March 8, 2023

# THE Hollywood REPORTER

OSCARS
2023

KIMMEL IS BACK
AND READY TO RUMBLE!

MO'NIQUE MAKES PEACE
(MOSTLY)

IS HOLLYWOOD TOO SENSITIVE
FOR THE RAZZIES?

AWARDS SEASON BFFs:
FAMOUS FRIENDSHIPS
THAT OUTLASTED
THE SELF-PROMOTION

*TITANIC* OSCARS AT 25:
THE ORAL HISTORY
OF AN EPIC SHOW

**PLUS**
A BRUTALLY
HONEST BALLOT

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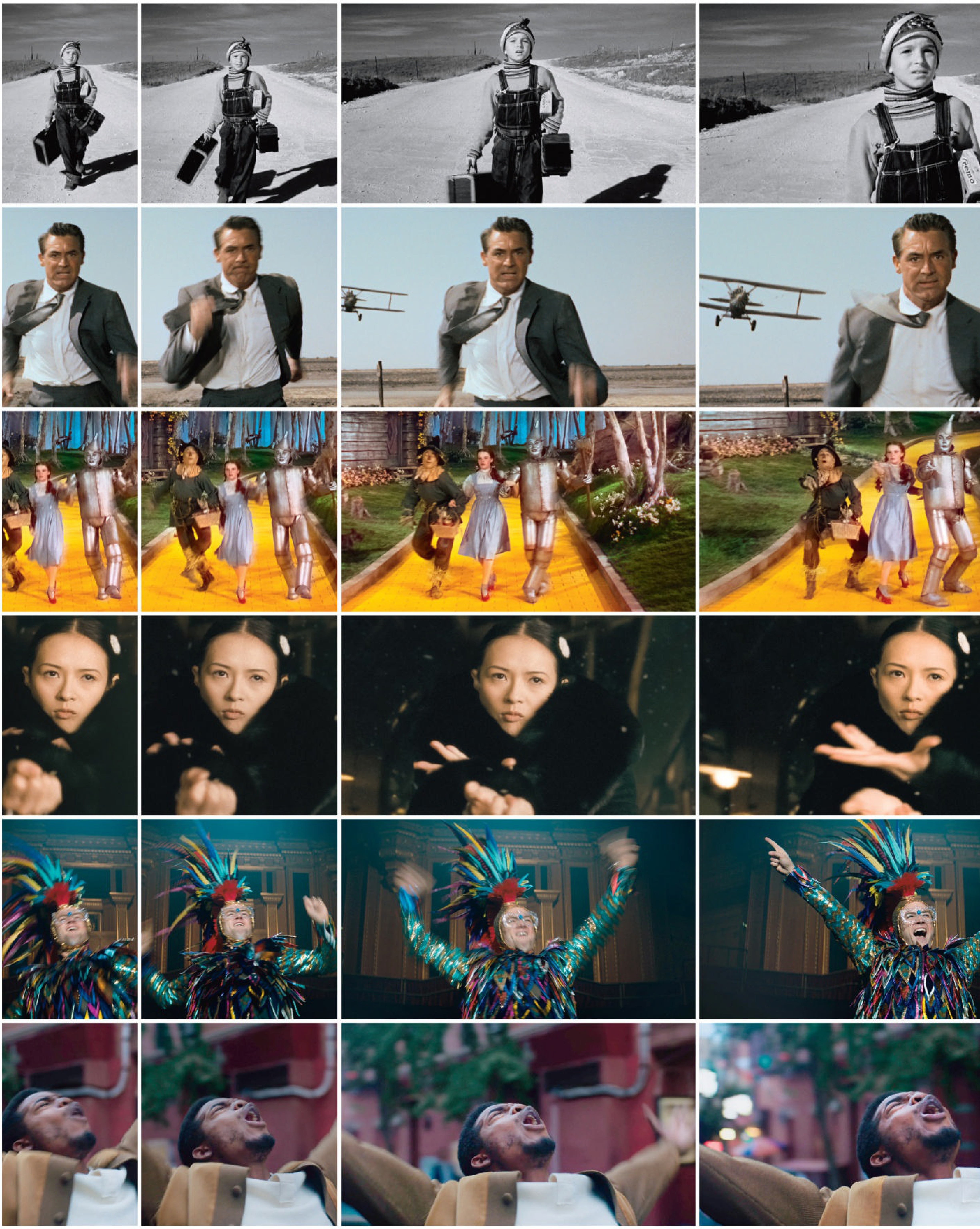
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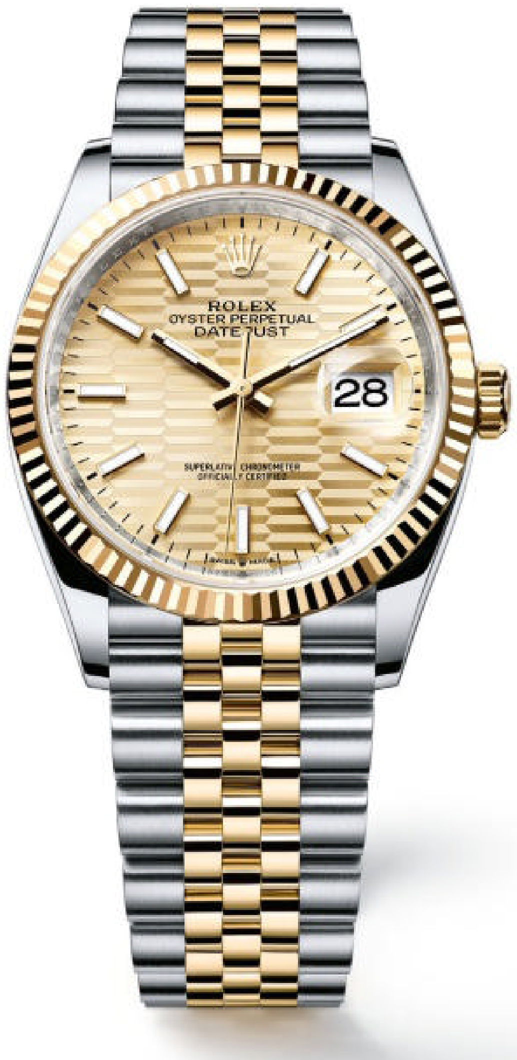
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The Hollywood Reporter

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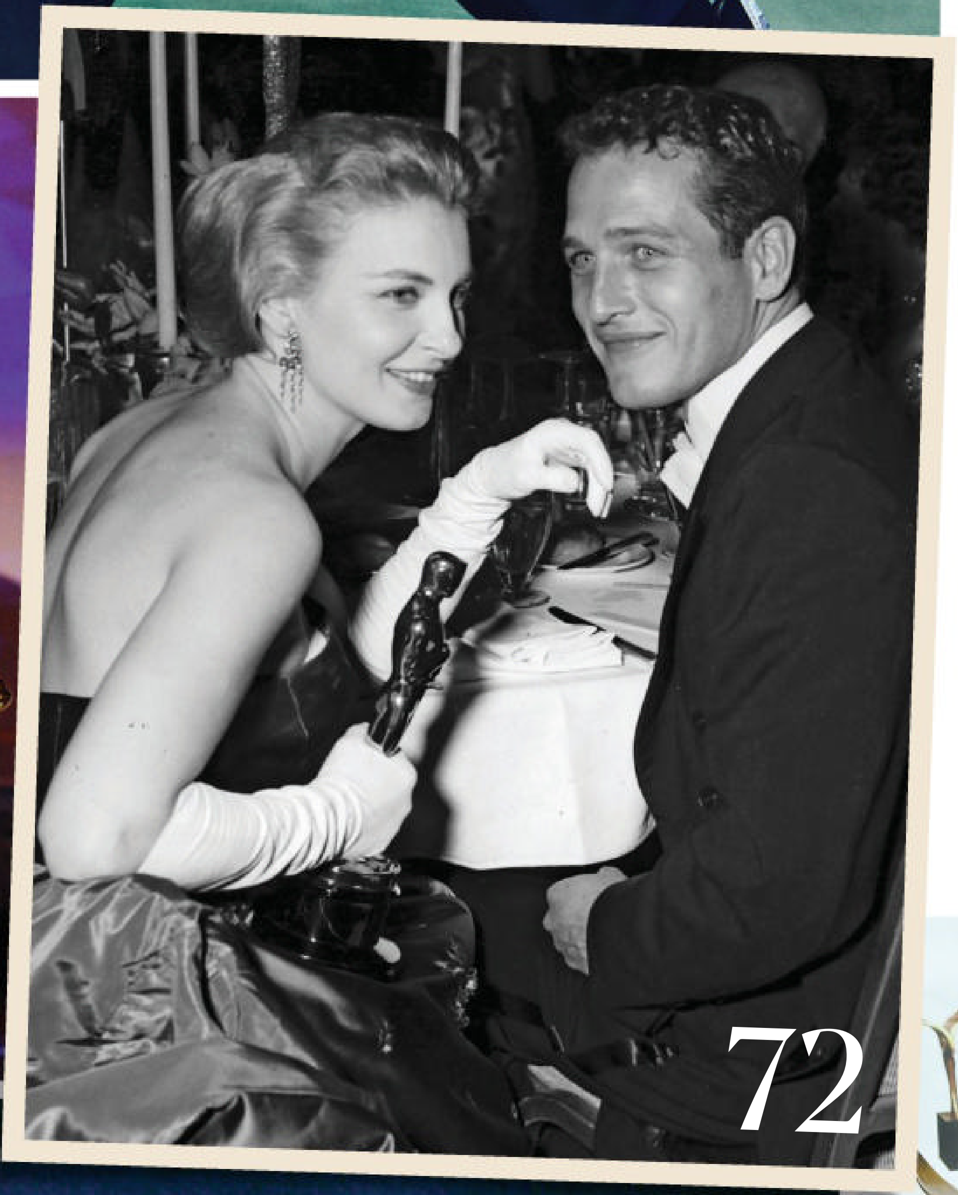

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WILLIAMS: JAI LENNARD. MO'NIQUE: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES. WOODWARD: COURTESY OF ©A.M.P.A.S. CAMERON: CINEMATIC COLLECTION/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. BONG: ROY ROCHLIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA EAST.

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Illustration by Zuzanna Rogatty

Photographed by **Birdie Thompson**

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# JESSICA CHASTAIN

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE BY A FEMALE ACTOR IN A TV MOVIE OR LIMITED SERIES

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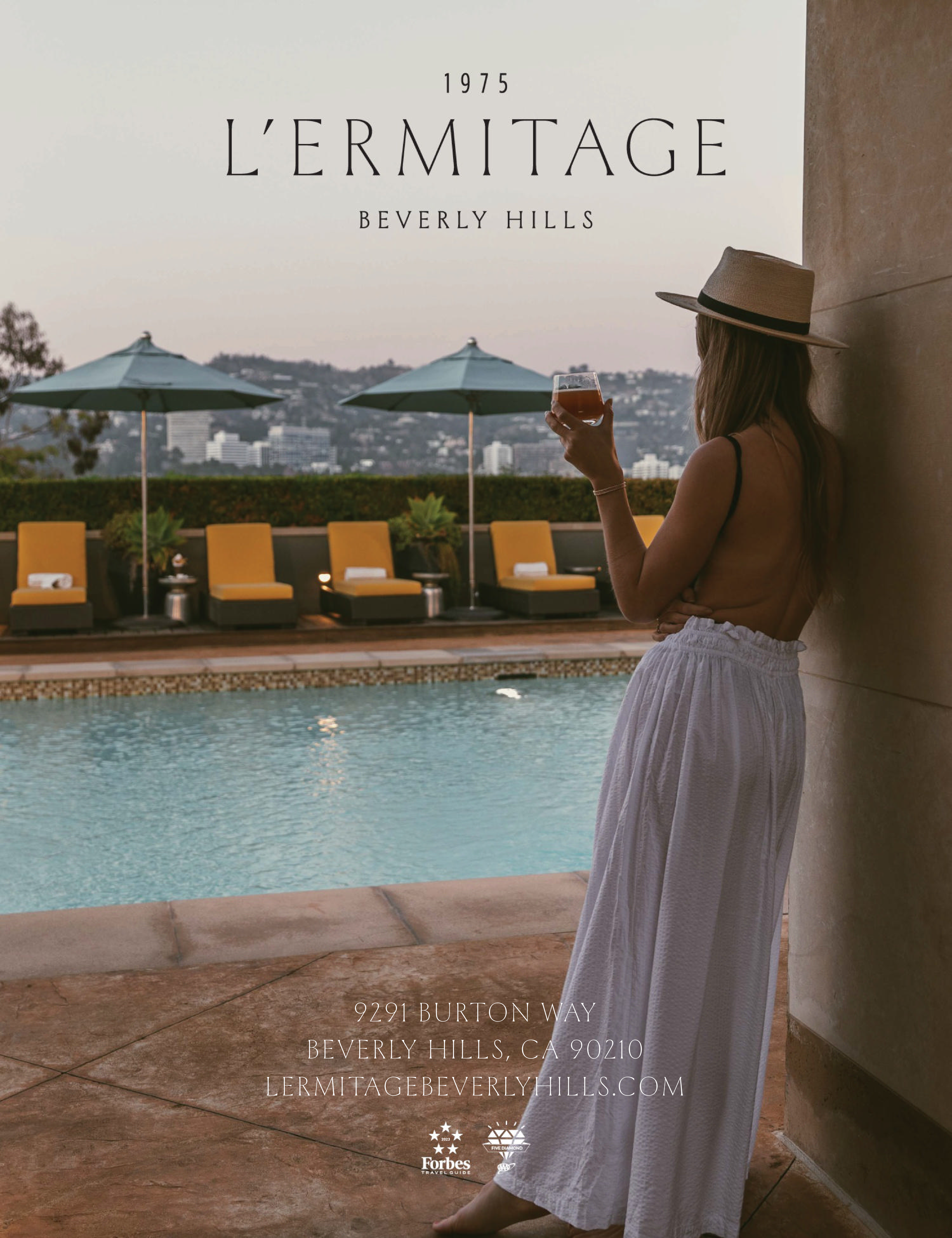

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**BET Up for Sale**

Tyler Perry, Byron Allen eye the brand **p. 18**

Box Office

**Churn 'Em Out!**

Theater chains ask for 100-plus titles a year **p. 14**

## Heat Index

↑

**Ellen Stutzman**

With David Young bowing out for medical reasons, the longtime Writers Guild exec will take over as chief negotiator with studios while strike rumblings loom.

↓

**Guy Ritchie**

Miramax and Lionsgate had to be hoping for more from the director as his latest caper, *Operation Fortune*, bows to just $3.1 million domestically from 2,100 theaters.

↑

**Malcolm D. Lee**

The director extended a first-look deal at Universal TV after *The Best Man: The Final Chapters* streamed on Peacock as the platform's top-viewed series premiere to date.

↓

**John Malone**

The billionaire settles with Charter to the tune of $87 million over a suit accusing him of illegally benefiting from the company's $78.7 billion acquisition of Time Warner Cable in 2015, though he made no admission of wrongdoing.

## Showbiz Stocks

↑ **$87.26** (+3.9%)
**SONY CORP.** (SONY)

Flush with cash, and without needing to plow investments into an owned streaming service, Sony is embracing its place as a content arms dealer.

↓ **$31.97** (-0.5%)
**FOX CORP.** (FOX)

New filings from the Dominion Voting Systems lawsuit raised concerns that a large payout may be necessary, either in a settlement or after a trial.

March 1-7

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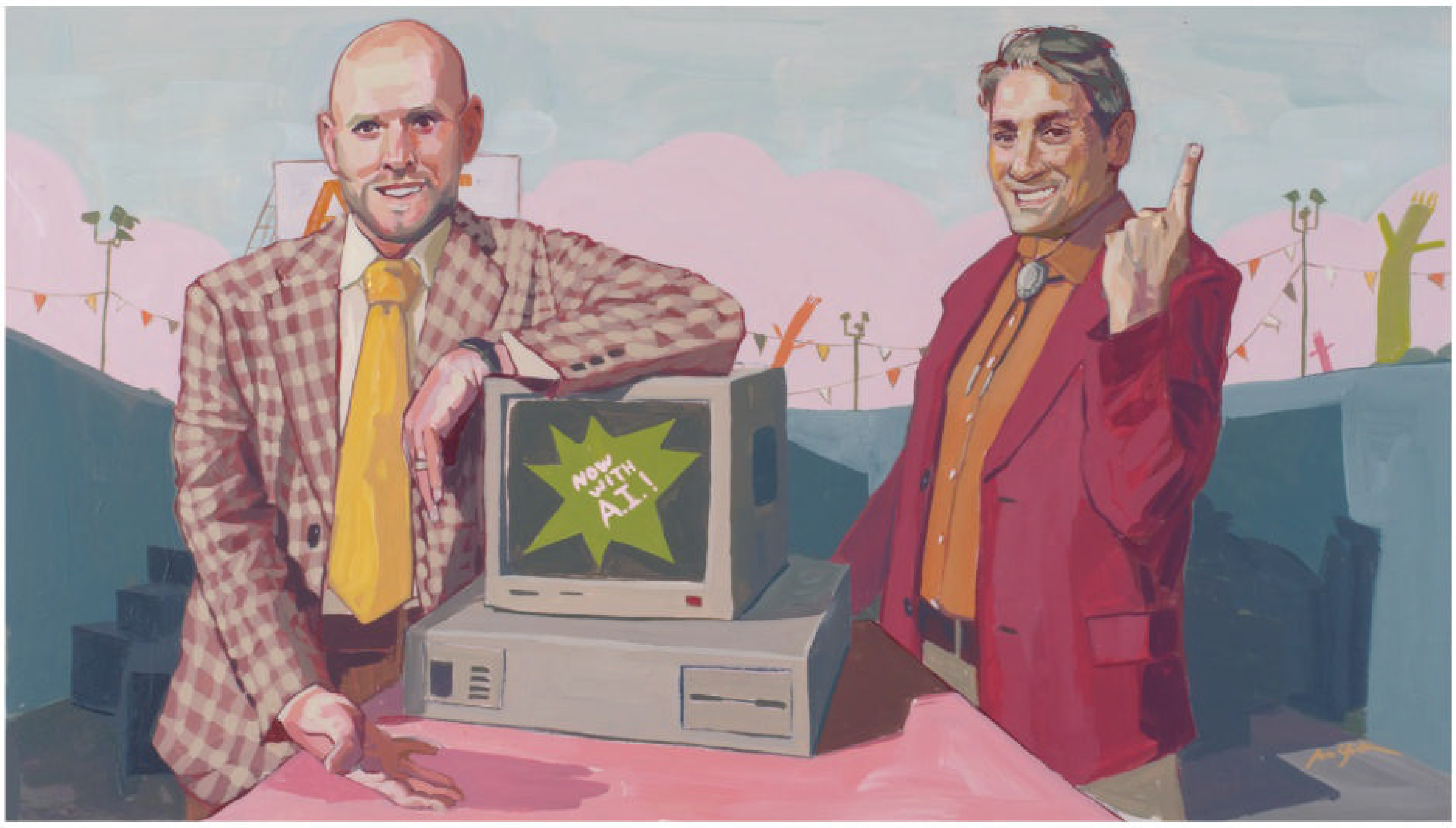


# Want to Impress Wall Street? Just Add Some AI

As media executives like Daniel Ek and Ari Emanuel look to pop the stock of flagging publicly traded companies, tech advances are becoming the new gimmick to wow (even temporarily) the investing class **BY ALEX WEPRIN**

When Endeavor CEO **Ari Emanuel** opened his company's earnings call with prepared remarks Feb. 28, a casual listener hearing him tout the UFC and WME might have missed the most interesting part: Emanuel wasn't speaking at all.

Well, he sort of was. The words were his, and the voice was his, but rather than Emanuel speaking into a microphone (opening remarks on earnings calls are often pretaped), the comments were the product of a generative artificial intelligence firm called Speechify.

So why did Ari Emanuel (er, "AI Emanuel"?) use his company's fourth-quarter earnings call to bring machine learning to its financial report? "We're in business with them, we think they're a really good company," Emanuel said of Speechify (and yes, Endeavor disclosed in its earnings press release that the comments would be computer-generated), but he also noted that "we thought with all the conversation around AI ... we thought it was a proper time to kind of put this into our quarter, and for you guys to hear what it's like."

Indeed, artificial intelligence has been hard to avoid for Wall Street watchers this year. And it's easy to understand why: AI news has led to share price surges at companies like BuzzFeed (which uses it and saw its stock price more than double) and Microsoft (whose rise was in the high single digits).

Mohan

After the public release of OpenAI's large language model (LLM) chatbot ChatGPT (and the stock bounce it gave to Microsoft, which is OpenAI's tech partner), it seems that every company wants a piece of the AI action, or at least wants to send the message that it's thinking about it. Companies with close ties to media and entertainment are no exception.

In his first letter to creators as CEO of YouTube, **Neal Mohan** wrote March 1 that "the power of AI is just beginning to emerge in ways that will reinvent video and make the seemingly impossible possible," and that it will be a priority for him.

Spotify, led by CEO **Daniel Ek**, released on Feb. 22 what it is calling an "AI DJ," powered by technology from OpenAI. The DJ takes the music a Spotify user listens to and combines it with recommendations from music experts and an AI-generated voice to create a totally personalized radio show.

Snap, run by **Evan Spiegel**, released an assistant called "My AI," based on ChatGPT, bringing the capabilities of that LLM to Snapchat+ users.

Illustration by **Jon Stich**

And at small digital publishers like the **Jonah Peretti**-led BuzzFeed and Arena Group Holdings (the owner of *Sports Illustrated*), AI is being touted as a fount of new types of storytelling that "can create enterprise value for our brands and partners," per Arena Group CEO **Ross Levinsohn**.

To be sure, AI's potential for transforming business is real (in a March 2 research report, Morgan Stanley called it a "$6 trillion opportunity"), but it remains just that: an opportunity, rather than today's reality.

"We have lived through a number of 'hype' cycles in technology investing over the past 20-plus years," Goldman Sachs analysts **Eric Sheridan** and **Kash Rangan** wrote in a Feb. 8 research report, calling out the "metaverse" talk last year. "Such cycles typically produce investor exuberance well in excess of actual product and unit economic shifts, while losing sight of the heavy lifting of actual investment cycles and necessary product iteration which typically take years to develop."

Wall Street is still very bullish on AI in the long term, with Bank of America's **Haim Israel** and **Martyn Briggs** writing in a Feb. 28 thematic report that AI is "at a defining moment — like the internet in the '90s," but the consensus is that while big tech firms like YouTube owner Alphabet, Amazon and Apple will reap the rewards at some point, what it means for smaller companies in the present is less clear.

Peretti

For entertainment companies, the potential is obvious, even if the business models are not. The Morgan Stanley report noted the logic in AI recommendations on streaming services like Spotify and Netflix (Spotify's DJ is a first step in that direction), and it isn't a stretch to think that content itself can be made faster and at less cost with generative technology (applications could include special effects, which are labor intensive and costly).

For companies like Endeavor and CAA, generative voice technology (like that from Speechify) and deepfake tech (like Deep Voodoo, a deepfake company from the creators of *South Park* that counts CAA Ventures as an investor), could mean new opportunities for old actors (see **Robert Zemeckis**' upcoming movie *Here*, which will use AI from Metaphysic to de-age **Tom Hanks**).

In the long term, the changes could be more profound, with Israel and Briggs mentioning "moving video content from a one-to-many content creation model to a one-to-one content consumption model that can become personalized."

In fact, that potential can be seen today at BuzzFeed, which is using OpenAI tech to create hyper-personalized quizzes ("There's the MCU, but This AI Quiz Will Create a You-CU by Writing You Into a Superhero Movie" is among the options).

But today's offerings also underscore just how hollow the AI hype really is. The products available today, from personalized quizzes and AI DJs to chatbots and deepfakes, are still firmly in the gimmick phase.

So while the possibilities are real, the current stock prices may be, to borrow a term for false information created by LLMs, a "hallucination." And those looking for a piece of the AI pie also need to proceed cautiously. **Michael Atleson**, an attorney in the advertising practices department of the Federal Trade Commission, wrote an open letter Feb. 27 laying out what his agency is looking at as "AI hype" creeps across corporate America.

"What exactly is 'artificial intelligence' anyway? It's an ambiguous term with many possible definitions," Atleson writes. "But one thing is for sure: It's a marketing term. Right now it's a hot one. And at the FTC, one thing we know about hot marketing terms is that some advertisers won't be able to stop themselves from overusing and abusing them." In other words: The feds are keeping a close eye on those AI claims.

# Amazon, MGM Deliver First Knockout Punch in the Theatrical Ring

*Creed III* was a test for the ecommerce giant's distribution unit, which has now absorbed United Artists Releasing

BY PAMELA MCCLINTOCK

MGM's movie studio has delivered its first knockout punch at the box office since being absorbed by Amazon Studios, creating a unique situation whereby a streamer is now flexing its muscle in the same theatrical ring that streamers have been accused of trying to harm.

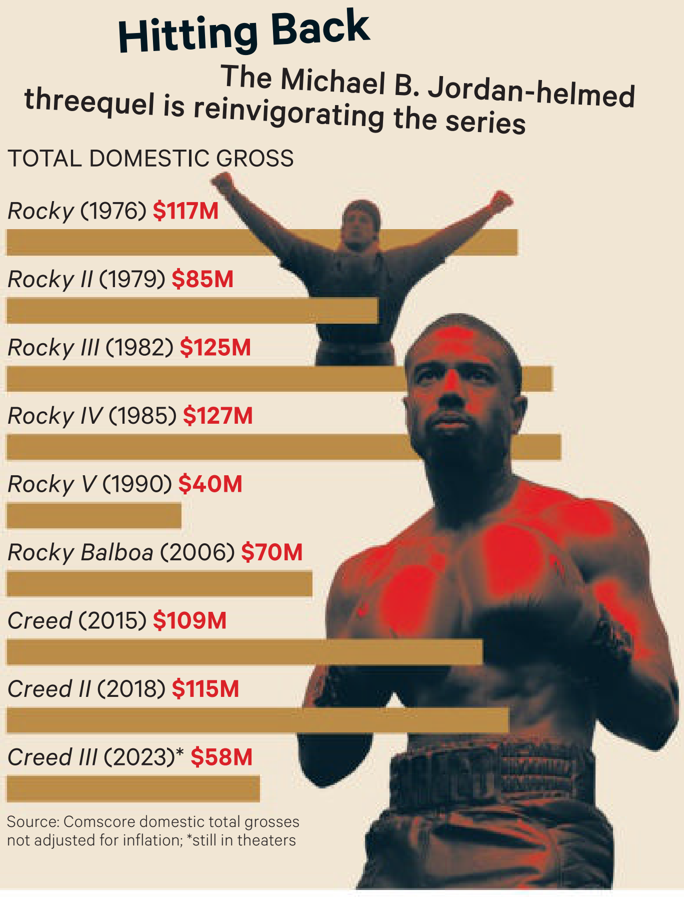
Over the March 3-5 weekend, **Michael B. Jordan**'s *Creed III* debuted to a rousing $58.4 million domestically, the biggest opening of the series, as well as the biggest start ever for a Hollywood sports film, not adjusted for inflation. *Creed III* caps months of speculation as to what MGM's film operation will look like in the Amazon era. The ecommerce giant closed its $8.45 billion deal to buy the storied studio nearly a year ago, but it wasn't until now that the picture became more clear, including the hire in recent days of veteran Warner Bros. production executive **Courtenay Valenti** as Amazon and MGM's new head of film. She'll report to Amazon and MGM Studios chief **Jennifer Salke**.

"Everything they are doing [at Amazon] shows their commitment to theatrical," says MGM head of distribution **Erik Lomis**, a veteran Hollywood executive who did an earlier stint at the studio during the days of *Rocky*. Amazon has an advantage among streamers. "Nobody else is positioned the same way with a full-fledged theatrical, marketing and distribution team," he adds.

In another key move, Amazon Studios signaled in February that it will indeed use its newfound association with a legacy Hollywood studio to give at least some of its movies a splashy big-screen release when announcing that **Ben Affleck**'s upcoming movie *Air*, starring **Matt Damon**, will open exclusively in theaters across the globe in early April versus going straight to Amazon Prime.

Both *Creed III* and *Air* will have a proper window before appearing in the home (in the pandemic era, the average window has collapsed to between 31 and 45 days). Nor is Amazon hiding grosses, as it has in the past when giving original films a select release in some cinemas.

In deference to filmmakers, Netflix has given many of its films an early release in theaters, but it still won't report grosses. Netflix co-CEO **Ted Sarandos** has repeatedly made it clear that its subscribers are the priority, not moviegoers.



Hitting Back

The Michael B. Jordan-helmed threequel is reinvigorating the series

Source: Comscore domestic total grosses not adjusted for inflation; *still in theaters

Salke's operation is taking a different tack. Behind the scenes, Amazon has absorbed United Artists Releasing, a distribution co-venture between MGM and **Megan Ellison**'s Annapurna Pictures. UAR was the distribution apparatus that allowed MGM to release its movies directly into theaters — including 007 installment *No Time to Die* — versus having to partner with another studio, at least domestically. Overseas is another matter, where Amazon and MGM movies will still be distributed by Warner Bros. International, including *Creed III* and *Air*. (Universal Pictures International handled *No Time to Die* and also has rights to the next, yet-to-be-announced James Bond pic.) And Amazon used its might to help market and promote *Creed III*. "They supercharged the campaign with all of their verticals," says Lomis.

For cinema owners, the foray of Amazon into theatrical is welcome news, even if it makes for a strange marriage. But that's not to say that every movie project will, like *Air*, receive a major release on the big screen. Affleck's Nike drama was originally intended for streaming, but Salke and her team changed their minds.

"Nobody else in town is positioned to pivot like this. Nobody," says a source. "Some movies are better with theatrical and some are better with streaming."

*ROCKY*: UNITED ARTISTS/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. *CREED*: COURTESY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURES INC. PERETTI: BENNETT RAGLIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR BUZZFEED INC.

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# Bruised But Not Broken: 2023 Outlook for Movie Theaters

Following a dismal earnings season, exhibitors hope that if studios can send them 100-plus features (and some streaming titles too), this year won't be a bust BY ETAN VLESSING

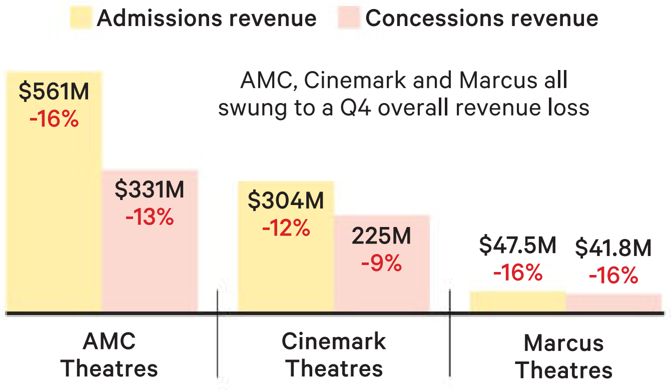
After a disappointing late summer and fall, major movie theater chains pinned hopes on a run of tentpoles that could help prop up the box office — and their bottom lines — from *Black Adam* to *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* and *Avatar: The Way of Water*. But, one by one, in reporting fourth-quarter earnings in February and early March, the top chains all posted revenue that fell short of even the comparable quarter in 2021, when the industry was in the thick of the pandemic.

While the impact of *The Way of Water*, the $2.2 billion grosser that opened Dec. 16, won't be fully felt until exhibitors report first-quarter results in the spring, the fourth-quarter numbers aren't encouraging. That's especially so when studio executives, from Warner Bros. Discovery CEO **David Zaslav** to Paramount Global chief **Bob Bakish**, have touted the important flywheel effect of launching their tentpoles in theaters instead of sending them directly to streaming services to pump up subscriber numbers. If the theatrical ecosystem can't fully recover, then it won't be much of a launchpad for ancillary markets either. The good news: Domestic box office revenue this year is up more than 37 percent. The bad: That's down 22 percent from 2019.

AMC Theatres, which operates 950 theaters globally, saw attendance hit 49.5 million, down from 60 million during the year-earlier period as its quarterly loss increased to $287 million, up from $134 million in 2021. On an earnings call Feb. 28, CEO **Adam Aron** told analysts after unveiling a sharp fall in attendance that he didn't see a full box office recovery before 2024 or 2025 at the earliest, although he bullishly predicted "a 75 percent increase in the number of major movie titles grossing $100 million or more compared to last year." (In 2022, the number of features hitting the $100 million mark globally was about 40.) Aron also noted that the No. 2 chain by theater count, Regal owner Cineworld, is now in bankruptcy court, as if to say, "See, things could be much worse."

**Holiday Hangover**

Major theater chains saw fourth-quarter 2022 dip below even 2021 for revenue and concessions



Source: Company reports on Q4 2022 admissions and concessions revenue; percentages are year-to-year comparisons and are rounded.

Cinemark, the No. 3 chain that operates nearly 520 theaters domestically and in Latin America, saw 39 million patrons buy tickets in the fourth quarter, down from 48 million customers a year before, leading to a loss of $98.8 million compared with a year-ago profit of $6.4 million. CEO **Sean Gamble**, on a Feb. 24 call with analysts, pointed multiple times to studios' release volume as a factor in the decline, noting optimistically that he expects 100 to 105 theatrical releases in 2023. That's down from a pre-pandemic level of 130 in terms of all films but still up from the past two years. (There were only 67 features released in 2,000-plus theaters in 2021 and 71 last year, compared with 112 in 2019 and 112 in 2018, per Comscore.) "Studios are looking at some of the other films they had originally been contemplating for streaming platforms and considering if those could be released theatrically instead," relayed Gamble on the call.

Credit rating firm Fitch wasn't sold, revising Cinemark's debt ratings outlook on March 3 to "negative" from "stable" to reflect concerns that near-term attendance growth may not reach expected levels, which would hold back plans to reduce the company's debt load. "While studios have publicly committed to theatrical release windows, there is no guarantee those films will drive attendance improvement," the agency pointedly noted.

Marcus Theatres, the No. 4 chain, with 84 locations in the U.S., is seen as shielded partly from some economic headwinds because its parent corporation also has a hotel division and owns real estate for the majority of theaters it operates. Admissions revenue in the fourth quarter fell to $47.5 million from $56.8 million a year earlier. On an earnings call March 2, Marcus Corp. CEO **Greg Marcus** said the exhibitor won't "throw in the towel" on hoping to recover to pre-pandemic revenue levels, noting that "there are a lot of content providers who make content who haven't been playing theatrically," referencing the hope that tech giants like Amazon or Apple would send more films to theaters.

In all the calls with investors, exhibition executives stressed that the prescription for bringing theatrical attendance and box office back to historical levels includes releasing more volume and diversity of films instead of just relying on the next superhero blockbusters. They also cautioned that recent revenue gains came from ticket price hikes, strong high-margin concession sales and premium big-screen play for tentpoles.

Even big-screen exhibitor Imax, viewed by Wall Street as a beneficiary of theatergoing as a "premium experience," posted fourth-quarter revenue of $98 million, down 10 percent from a year-earlier $108.6 million. But CEO **Richard Gelfond** on a Feb. 22 call struck a bullish note about the recovery of China's theatrical market, where Imax has 800 screens and more exposure than in the U.S. And, in a nod to *Avatar*, which delivered $140 million in box office to Imax during the last two weeks of December alone, Gelfond leaned into optimism: "We saw a correction coming to the economic model for streaming services. It's easy to forget now, but there are a lot of folks who doubted *Top Gun* and *Avatar* before their releases. But we were bullish on those blockbusters from the beginning, and we were right."

*Pamela McClintock contributed to this report.*

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# Stars Power Broadway's Rebound

A new crop of plays featuring A-listers are reeling in crowds in an encouraging sign for live theater BY CAITLIN HUSTON

As Broadway moves toward its busy spring season, star power has returned to the Great White Way and boosted box offices in the process.

After making her Broadway debut in 2012, **Jessica Chastain** is back to star as Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House*. The classic **Henrik Ibsen** play, which was adapted by **Amy Herzog** and directed by **Jamie Lloyd**, began previews at the Hudson Theatre on Feb. 13 and has played to nearly full houses so far, minting a strong $811,261 in its first full week of performances.

The musical *Parade*, starring **Ben Platt**, began previews Feb. 21 at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre and played to more than 100 percent capacity (including standing-room tickets), bringing in just above $587,000 in its first four preview performances. This came as the revival — which chronicles the true story of a Jewish factory worker who was wrongly accused of murdering a teenage girl and then lynched by a mob — faced a protest from members of a neo-Nazi group outside the theater during its first preview. The musical, which originally opened on Broadway in 1998 and features a score by **Jason Robert Brown** and book by **Alfred Uhry**, returns to the district after a sold-out engagement at off-Broadway's New York City Center in fall 2022. A revival of **Stephen Sondheim**'s *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, led by **Josh Groban** and **Annaleigh Ashford**, began previews Feb. 26 at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre and, after one performance, played to capacity, bringing in $260,691, with an average ticket price of $174 (the third-highest of that week, after *Phantom of the Opera* and *Hamilton*).

The timing of these star-studded returns is not unusual; spring is always the industry's busiest time. Many shows try to set opening dates close to the Tony Awards eligibility

# Scorsese's *Devil* Back in Development Hell

The *Devil in the White City* limited series had been in talks with new stars for a Hulu adaptation, but the plug was pulled and ABC Signature is shopping it once again

In the latest twist in its lengthy development résumé, *The Devil in the White City*, the limited series from producers **Martin Scorsese** and **Leonardo DiCaprio**, is no longer moving forward at Hulu. However, sources tell *THR* that producer ABC Signature remains committed to the drama and will be shopping the show to new outlets.

The news comes months after leading man **Keanu Reeves** and director **Todd Field** (*Tár*) dropped out of the drama in October.

Sources say Hulu and Paramount Television Studios and Disney's ABC Signature, who together were on board to produce the series, had been in talks with *The Bear* star **Jeremy Allen White** and **Jude Law** and director **Matt Ross** for the project. White, Law and Ross are still in talks for it, sources say, though it's unclear if they will close deals given the fact that *Devil* does not currently have a home.

The project has been in the works for more than a decade, with **Sam Shaw** (Hulu's *Castle Rock*) on board as writer, showrunner and exec producer. DiCaprio and his Appian Way partner, **Jennifer Davisson**, are exec producers alongside Scorsese. The latter was previously set to direct the feature film take that had been set up at Paramount Pictures, with DiCaprio formerly set to star. The studio had won the rights to the novel after a massive bidding war in 2015, when **Billy Ray** was on board to pen the script.

In its TV incarnation, Reeves — after months of dealmaking — was attached to star and exec

From left: Josh Groban and Annaleigh Ashford star in a *Sweeney Todd* revival, while Ben Platt leads *Parade.*

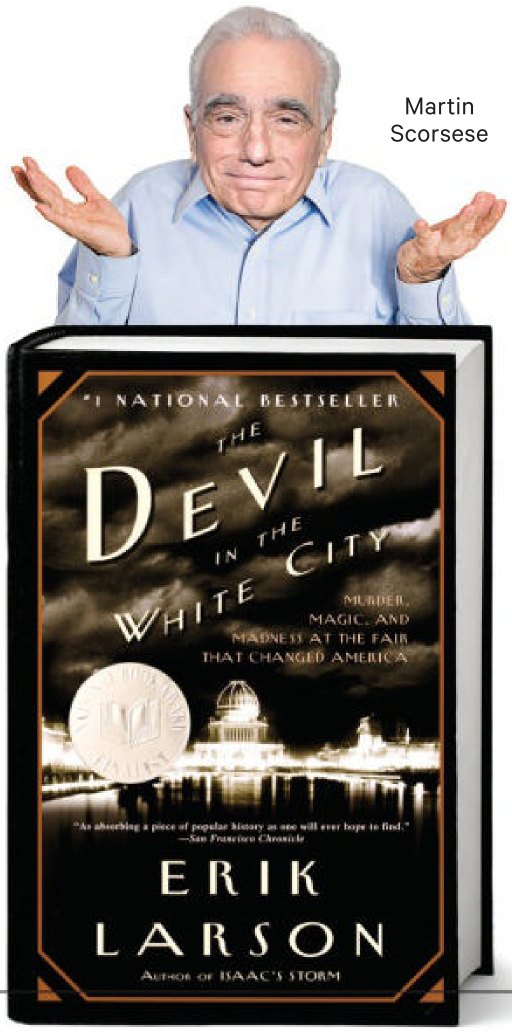
cutoff in late April and then hope to capitalize on tourists visiting in summer, as well as any bump from Tony wins on June 11. **Jodie Comer** will also be on Broadway, starring in **Suzie Miller**'s one-person play *Prima Facie* starting in April at the John Golden Theatre. And **Sean Hayes** will appear as the titular character in *Good Night, Oscar*, a play about pianist **Oscar Levant**, opening the same month at the Belasco Theatre.

Still, celebrities are a helpful presence on Broadway, as the industry looks to bounce back after its 18-month closure. *Funny Girl* demonstrates what an impact a star can have on box office. The musical opened at the August Wilson Theatre in April 2022, with **Beanie Feldstein** in the lead role, but saw its grosses fall that summer after Feldstein received less-than-stellar reviews. Since **Lea Michele** took over the part in September, the musical has broken the theater's box office record multiple times. Whenever she's out of the show, grosses suffer. In the week ending Feb. 26, when Michele and co-star **Ramin Karimloo** were on vacations, the box office at *Funny Girl* fell nearly $950,000 from the previous week.

Overall, there are strong signs of progress: The total gross across the industry for the week surrounding Presidents Day was $25.8 million, up this year compared to 2022 (though there were four fewer shows playing in 2022 and the industry was recovering from a surge in omicron cases). And while the number of running shows, and therefore total gross, is still below the $29.9 million that week in 2019 (there were 23 running shows this year compared to 29 in 2019), the box office totals are catching up.

From the point of view of long-running shows, the industry is already back, says **Mike Rafael**, a ticketing sales consultant on *Wicked*. "Yes, we would like to see the international tourism numbers come up a little bit, but domestic is really strong," Rafael says. (Suburban audience members are also still lagging pre-pandemic totals, as Rafael posits that many are not commuting to work in the city as frequently.) This comes as the audience makeup has changed, with more young and "culturally curious" audience members attending Broadway shows, he says. This group tends to attend more special-event theater, such as the celebrity-driven shows, big brands or known subject matter, like *MJ: The Musical*. And once there, people are willing to pay a premium for the experience.

But these gains are not easily won. Advance-sales numbers for most shows are still behind what they were pre-pandemic, which means the weekly totals can come down to the wire, making the producing process more nail-biting. Adds **John Johnson**, executive producer on the new musical *Bad Cinderella*, of the lack of advance-ticket purchases for some shows: "There's no urgency to what they're buying." THR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THE DEVIL IN THE WHITE CITY
MURDER, MAGIC, AND MADNESS AT THE FAIR THAT CHANGED AMERICA
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AUTHOR OF ISAAC'S STORM

Martin Scorsese

produce the series that landed at Hulu for development in 2019 and was formally picked up to series last year. Field was on board to direct the crime drama, which ultimately became a coproduction between Paramount Television Studios and Disney's ABC Signature. **Rick Yorn**, **Stacey Sher** and **Mark Lafferty** also are exec producing the series.

Based on **Erik Larson**'s best-selling book, *Devil* revolves around **Daniel H. Burnham** (the role formerly to have been played by Reeves), a demanding but visionary architect who races to make his mark on history with the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, and Dr. **H.H. Holmes**, America's first modern serial killer and the man behind the notorious "Murder Castle" built in the fair's shadow.

Scorsese and DiCaprio, frequent film collaborators, have also previously developed TV takes on *Gangs of New York* and *Shutter Island*, though neither moved beyond the script stage. — LESLEY GOLDBERG

SWEENEY: FRANZ SZONY. PARADE: EMILIO MADRID. SCORSESE: EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES FOR AFI. DEVIL: COURTESY OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE. MAN: ADOBE STOCK.

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| Scream

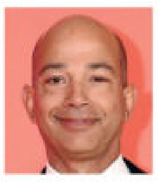
Behind the Headlines

# 7 Days of DEALS

Who's inking on the dotted line this week

## TYLER PERRY, BYRON ALLEN EYE MAJORITY STAKE IN BET

**Deal of the Week**


Mills

Bakish

As Paramount explores a sale of a majority stake in its BET business — which includes BET, VH1 and the BET+ streaming service — multiple potential suitors are emerging. **Tyler Perry**, a longtime partner of BET, is engaged in conversations to buy the stake, sources tells *THR*. The megaproducer's deal with Paramount, which began in 2017, is said to be coming up, and the BET purchase, if it happens, would give him ownership of the brand that airs many of his shows.

Another potential suitor is **Byron Allen**, who controls a number of local TV stations, The Weather Channel and other assets via his Entertainment Studios firm. "Byron Allen is interested in buying BET, and he will be pursuing the acquisition of the network," a rep for the mogul says.

Other parties are also said to have expressed an interest in the businesses. Discussions around the sale are still in the early stages, and there is no guarantee of any transaction taking place. Sources add that if a deal closes, Paramount expects to maintain a minority stake as well as a commercial relationship with the business.

BET, led by CEO **Scott Mills**, also is unusual within Paramount's portfolio in that some of its divisions have minority investors of their own. BET+, for example, counts Perry as one, while **Kenya Barris** and **Rashida Jones** are stakeholders in BET Studios. Those agreements would complicate any effort to merge BET+ or BET Studios into Paramount+ or one of the company's other divisions.

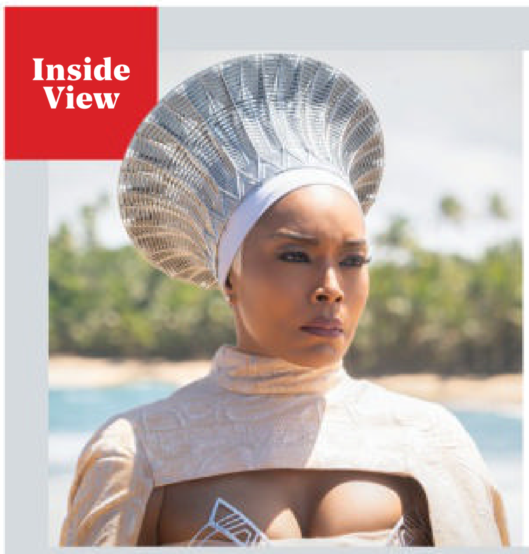
Such a deal, if it happens, would give the **Bob Bakish**-run Paramount needed cash as it continues to build out its main streaming offering, Paramount+, and as it reviews its holdings and figures out how things piece together in its strategy moving forward. For Perry, a deal would not only give him and his company a pair of widely distributed cable channels but also ownership of a streaming service that could grow into a business of its own. For Allen, a deal would mean an expansion of his cable business — The Weather Channel, like BET and VH1, is widely distributed — and add another streaming service to his portfolio of offerings that include Local Now and Sports.TV.

"I'm close to the same age as when **Rupert Murdoch** came here to America," Allen told *THR* of his vision to expand in 2020. "He was in his 50s. I'm 59. What you see today will be 10,000 times bigger."

Founded in 1980 by former cable lobbyist **Robert Johnson** and his wife, **Sheila Johnson**, the BET channel was the first cable network to specifically cater to African American audiences. Paramount (then known as Viacom) acquired BET in 2000 for $2.3 billion. A number of high-profile advertisers, including General Motors and Coca-Cola, committed to significantly increase their ad spend on minority-owned media companies in 2021. While BET targets a minority audience, its Paramount ownership would not fit that bill. A Tyler Perry- or Byron Allen-owned BET, however, would. — ALEX WEPRIN

Byron Allen (left) and Tyler Perry have each expressed interest in buying a majority stake in BET.

**Inside View**



### *Wakanda's* Streaming Bow

DISNEY+

**2.27B**
minutes viewed

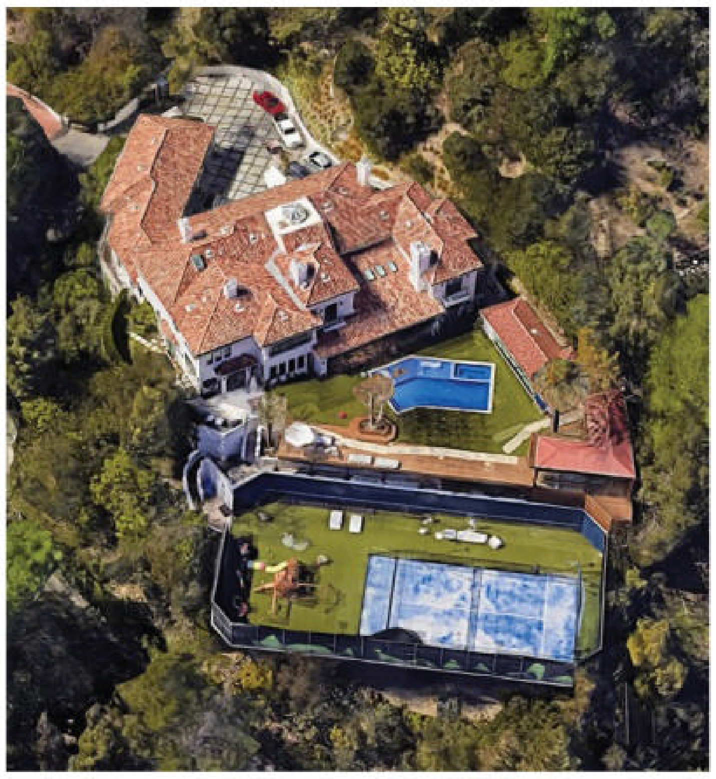
The Marvel sequel was the third-biggest box office draw in the U.S. last year, but the $450 million-plus it earned in theaters didn't exhaust demand for the movie when the **Angela Bassett** starrer moved into homes. *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* recorded 2.27 billion minutes of watch time on Disney+ in its first week, the best single-week total for a Marvel movie and the third-largest for any feature on any platform that reports viewership since Nielsen began tracking streaming. The viewing time equates to more than 14 million full runs of the 161-minute film. — RICK PORTER

BAKISH: JOHN LAMPARSKI/GETTY IMAGES. MILLS: GILBERT FLORES/VARIETY VIA GETTY IMAGES. PERRY: ALEXANDER TAMARGO/GETTY IMAGES. *PANTHER*: ANNETTE BROWN/MARVEL. HOME: GOOGLE MAPS. BOOK: COURTESY OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE. PEDOWITZ: PHILLIP CHIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR WARNER BROTHERS TELEVISION.

# $90M

**Big Number**

**Funds raised by Charles D. King's Macro multimedia company in a round led by investment giant BlackRock and Harbourview Equity.**



Longoria and Bastón's Beverly Hills estate was built in 1996.

**Rep Sheet**

**CAA** inked former CW chief **Mark Pedowitz**, *Industry* actor **David Jonsson**, *Rye Lane* actress **Vivian Oparah** and journalist **Cerise Castle.**

Singer-actress **Kelly Rowland** has signed with **UTA**, as has *Cropsey* director **Joshua Zeman.**

*I'm Fine (Thanks for Asking)* co-director **Kelley Kali** signed with **Gersh.**

*Silicon Valley* actress **Jill Alexander** inked with **APA.**

## FILM/TV

**Scarlett Johansson (CAA)** is circling the lead in **Nancy Meyers'** rom-com *Paris Paramount* for Netflix, with **Penélope Cruz (CAA)**, **Owen Wilson (UTA)** and **Michael Fassbender (Sloane, Offer)** also eyeing roles.

**Archie Renaux (Artist Partnership)**, **Spike Fearn (Hamilton Hodell)** and **Aileen Wu (Helen Campbell)** have joined **Cailee Spaeny** in the **Fede Álvarez**-directed *Alien* installment from 20th Century.

*Portlandia* co-creator **Jonathan Krisel (UTA)** is in talks to direct the sequel *Pokémon Detective Pikachu* for Legendary Entertainment.

**Jack Kesy (Paradigm)** will star as Hellboy alongside **Jefferson White (Gersh)** and **Adeline Rudolph (APA)** in Millennium's *The Crooked Man*, from director **Brian Taylor**.

**Aaron Taylor-Johnson (WME)** joined **Bill Skarsgard (WME)** and **Nicholas Hoult (UTA)** in Focus Features' remake *Nosferatu*, written and directed by **Robert Eggers**.

**Milo Manheim (UTA)** joined the cast of **Eli Roth**'s slasher thriller *Thanksgiving* for Spyglass.

**John Cena (WME)**, **Awkwafina (UTA)** and **Simu Liu (CAA)** are set to star in the Amazon action comedy *Grand Death Lotto* from director **Paul Feig**.

HBO's *Watchmen* director **Nicole Kassell (WME)** is set to helm Greek mythology actioner *Medusa*, in development at Amazon Studios. **Nicole Perlman (WME)** wrote the script.

*Deadpool* actor **Karan Soni (CAA)** nabbed a voiceover role in Marvel's animated sequel *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*.

**Alex Gibney**'s Jigsaw Productions **(UTA)** is producing a documentary on **Elon Musk**.

**Melissa Barrera (WME)** will lead the horror romantic comedy *Your Monster* from writer-director **Caroline Lindy**.

*True Detective* creator **Nic Pizzolatto (WME)** landed a series commitment from Amazon Studios for an untitled Western drama. **Nick Pepper** is writing and will exec produce alongside **Mark Johnson**.

*The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* star **Alex Borstein (WME)** is readying her first Amazon Original comedy special, *Alex Borstein: Corsets & Clown Suits*.

**Lesli Linka Glatter (CAA)** signed on to direct Netflix's limited series thriller *Zero Day*, starring **Robert De Niro**, from *Narcos* showrunner **Eric Newman**.

**Bebe Neuwirth (CAA)** will guest star on Paramount+'s *Frasier* sequel comedy, reprising her role as Frasier Crane's ex-wife, Lilith.

**Kristen Bell (CAA)** is set to star in an untitled Netflix comedy series from creator **Erin Foster** and executive producer **Steven Levitan**.

**Priscilla Presley (WME)** signed on to voice herself on Netflix's animated series *Agent Elvis*, which has **Matthew McConaughey (WME)** voicing The King.

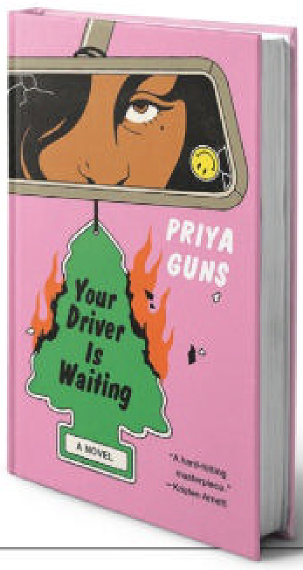
## REAL ESTATE

**Eva Longoria** and **José Bastón** have listed an 11,000-square-foot, eight-bedroom home in Beverly Hills for $22.8 million.

**Marc Forster** has listed a 4,300-square-foot, five-bedroom residence in Santa Monica for $12.7 million.

**Savannah Guthrie** and **Michael Feldman** listed a 3,725-square-foot, four-bedroom loft condo in Tribeca for $7.1 million.

— COMPILED BY ERIK HAYDEN



# Rights Available!

## Hot new books with Hollywood appeal BY SEIJA RANKIN

### *Your Driver Is Waiting*

(DOUBLEDAY, FEB. 28) BY **Priya Guns**
AGENCY **SoloSon Media, WME**

This debut novel takes *Taxi Driver* and modernizes it with a struggling ride-share gig worker who encounters a wealthy and seemingly woke passenger who could have sinister intentions.

### *Empty Theatre*

(MCD, FEB. 21) BY **Jac Jemc**
AGENCY **WME**

A raucous comedy in the vein of *The Great*, this fictionalizes the tale of **King Ludwig II** of Bavaria and **Empress Elisabeth** of Austria, with the 19th century royal cousins as creative (and wacky) trailblazers.

POPULAR IS Paramount

# About T wn

People, Places,

NEXT BIG THING

## Shamier Anderson

The *Bruiser* and *John Wick 4* star's secret weapon? Moonlighting as DJ Shamgod

By Cori Murray

If anyone embodies **Drake**'s song "Started From the Bottom," **Shamier Anderson**, a fellow Canadian, does. "I've been grinding for a minute from Toronto," says the actor, who grew up in the city's Scarborough district with three brothers and their single mom, a Jamaican immigrant. "My mother didn't accept the labels that we had very little hope, very little promise. She used to tell us, 'Even though they label you as an at-risk community, we're at risk to be extraordinary.' "

Anderson took his mother's words to heart: He started from the bottom, and now he's here.

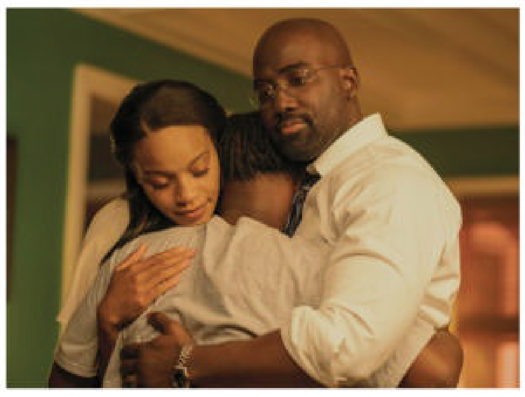
At 6-foot-2, he walks into the Southgate Bar at the Essex Hotel in New York, smiling brightly even though he's in the middle of a 48-hour sprint promoting his latest movie, *Bruiser*. Streaming now on Hulu, the Onyx Collective drama stars Anderson as the temperamental father of an impressionable teen boy (**Jalyn Hall**). The latter forms a connection to a drifter who's connected to Anderson's character's past. "Black fathers are usually absent, incarcerated or dead in cinema, period," says the 31-year-old. "So I love the fact that we have not only one, but two Black men wanting to be in their child's life."

On March 20, when his next film, *John Wick: Chapter 4*, premieres, Anderson will pull double duty as action star and DJ for a party at the Canadian consulate in L.A. That's right, **DJ Shamgod** comes out at night.

"I fell in love with storytelling. I was in theater school from 15 to 18. Then I went to university for criminology because my mom wanted me to," recalls Shamier Anderson. "At 21, I decided to make the leap with my brother [Stephan James], who's also an actor. We had a suitcase, we had a couple bucks. We rented a house, he had a car. Now, almost 10 years later, we're doing what we're doing today."

"I've used DJing as a way to make money when I needed to, and then I do it quietly, meaning friends' parties, wrap parties," he says. "When I do B.L.A.C.K. Ball, my party in Toronto, I always do a special guest set — DJ Shamgod comes on. People really like my stuff." His giddiness over spinning is palpable. He's already thinking of the playlist, which will likely include some **Notorious B.I.G.**, EDM and South African amapiano.

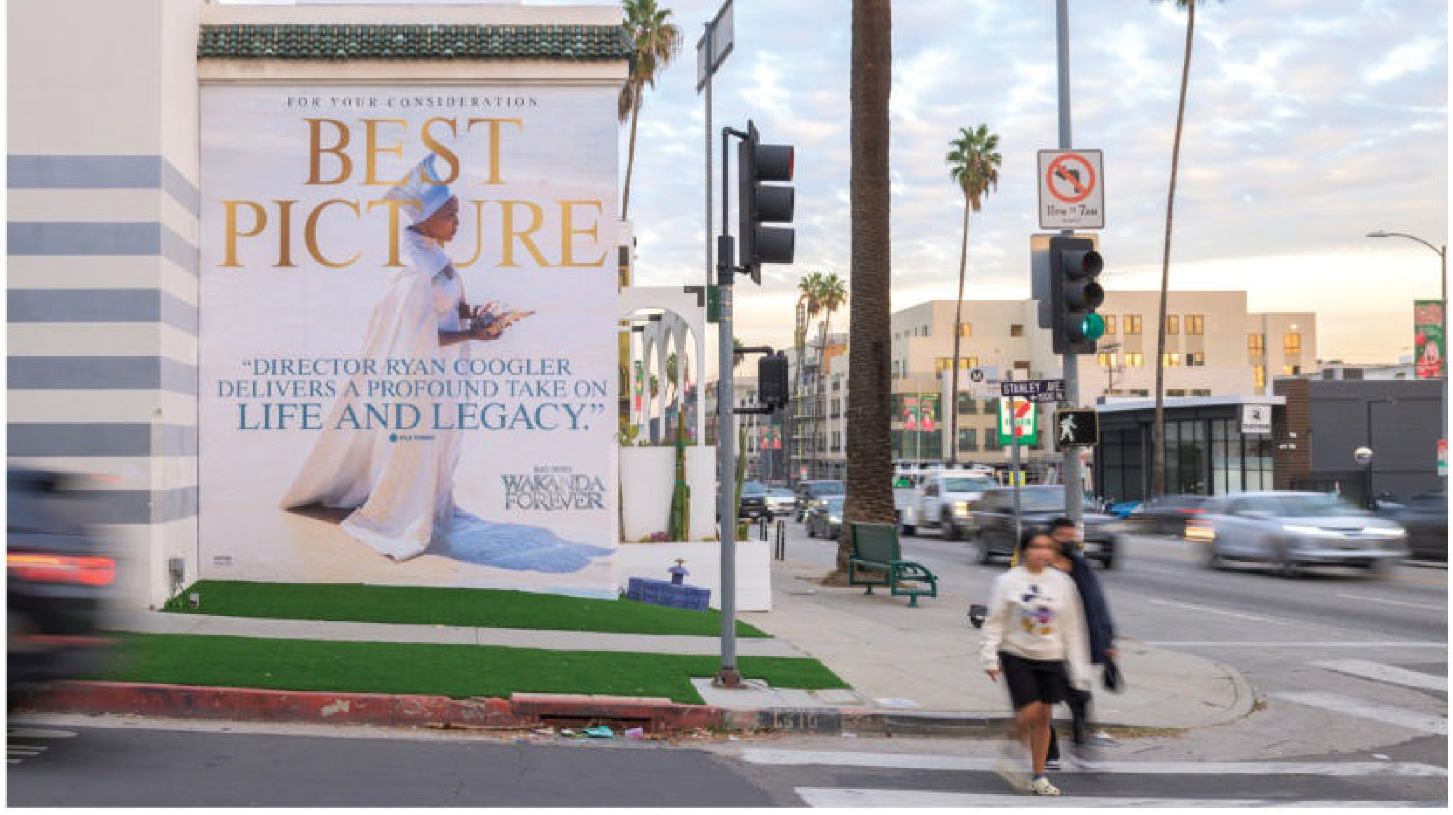
The B.L.A.C.K. Ball (the acronym stands for Building a Legacy in Acting, Cinema and Knowledge) has come a long way from being the hottest afterparty celebrating Black Canadians during the Toronto International Film Festival. Co-founders Anderson and his brother **Stephan James**, also an actor (*If Beale Street Could Talk*), went on to create the Black Academy, which aims to dismantle systemic racism through community-building. In October, they created and hosted the Legacy Awards, the first Black Canadian awards show honoring artists, performers, actors and sportscasters north of the border. Performers included **Jully Black** and **Deborah Cox**.



From left: Shinelle Azoroh, Jalyn Hall and Anderson in a scene from the film *Bruiser.*

After *John Wick 4*, in which he plays a tracker trying to assassinate **Keanu Reeves**, Anderson will return to **Simon Kinberg**'s *Invasion* for Apple TV+. He also has upcoming roles in **Mo McRae**'s *A Lot of Nothing* and **Brad Furman**'s *Tin Soldier*. "I'm saying no a lot more," says the actor of this point in his career. "I'm being very cognizant of what I want to bring to my life creatively, time-commitment-wise. [But when I'm working,] I'm like a pit bull. When I lock jaw, my process is vicious, I go in. But when it's time to let go, I let go and I release. It's the Jamaican in me, my single mom in me."

ANDERSON: DANIEL PRAKOPCYK. *BRUISER*: DAN ANDERSON/HULU. BILLBOARDS: COURTESY OF KEVANI (2).


FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
BEST PICTURE
"DIRECTOR RYAN COOGLER DELIVERS A PROFOUND TAKE ON LIFE AND LEGACY."
WAKANDA FOREVER

A vinyl FYC ad for *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, placed by Kevani in L.A. at Sunset Boulevard and Stanley Avenue.

# After Pandemic Drop, Outdoor Ads Rebounded in 2022

'Entertainment ads took off like a rocket ship,' says the CEO of Regency Outdoor Advertising, with film and TV companies preferring the ease of vinyl billboards while luxury brands opt for hand-painted

By Evan Nicole Brown

During 2020, the first year of the pandemic, spending on outdoor advertising slumped big-time when folks were home and spending far less time in their cars.

But in 2022, according to Insider Intelligence, spending on out-of-home advertising rebounded to an estimated $7.93 billion in the U.S., up from $6.08 billion in 2020 (though still not back to the $8.65 billion spent in 2019). Car-centric Los Angeles — where significant FYC campaigning takes over billboards across the city — factored into that recovery, says **Philip Berardi**, president and CEO of Regency Outdoor Advertising.

According to Berardi, "2020 saw revenues decline by approximately half, and this revenue decline persisted until approximately the end of Q2 2021, after which the market for FYC and entertainment ads took off like a rocket." He adds that "2022 was a great year with strong revenues across all areas." Among the top outdoor advertisers in the U.S. last year, according to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, were Apple, Amazon and Paramount+.

But the type of billboard that companies gravitate toward is driven by a mix of commercial and aesthetic choices. Apart from the fast-growing segment of digital displays, billboard displays come down to two choices: those made vinyl, with and without PVC, and those that are hand-painted. Hollywood generally favors the former.

"Most entertainment companies will use vinyl, especially for FYC campaigns, just in case there's a need to quickly change it out or they don't get the nomination," says **Kevin Bartanian**, founder of Los Angeles-based media sales company Kevani. "[They] tend to go with vinyls and digital as opposed to hand paints."

On the other hand, heritage and luxury brands often opt to go the hand-painted route, according to Bartanian, in many cases because those billboards offer a whiff of nostalgia. "We always tell advertisers, especially at eye-level closer to the sidewalk, that this is an art piece. It's not meant to look exactly like a print. It's going to have natural imperfections," he says, noting that there's no price differential at Kevani between vinyl and hand-painted. (Prime billboards on the Sunset Strip cost at least $75,000 and can run much higher for a four-week ad.)

During the painting stage — which can take up to a week — "a fun process happens," says Bartanian.

"It almost becomes a show as they're painting it," he explains. "Especially if you're painting in a very concentrated area, it creates a crowd because you have two, three, sometimes four people on a given wall: One side is sketching, the other one is literally mixing paint, and the other one is painting. So it's a very involved, interactive process. People are usually awed by it."

Bartanian also notes that the pandemic affected advertising locally in L.A. in significant ways, with people spending more time in the areas where they live. He says studios, for instance, increased their targeting of such areas as downtown Los Angeles, Hollywood and Koreatown for FYC campaigns. Says Bartanian, "People have moved around and [voters] are kind of everywhere, and then that audience profile is translating to our advertising."

Expertly acted
2 SAG Award Nominations
BLACK BIRD
GANGNAM STATION
PARIS BAGUETTE

A billboard for *Black Bird* that was placed by Apple TV+ on Wilshire Boulevard in Koreatown.

# *THR*'s Awards Season Awards

There simply aren't enough little gold men to celebrate the countless, hyper-specific ways in which Hollywood denizens excelled, subverted and downright confused during this year's seemingly endless road to the Oscars — so, to fill the gaps, *THR* offers additional accolades and superlatives that demand acknowledgment By Mikey O'Connell

**MOST EXECUTIVE ENEMIES MADE IN A MONOLOGUE**

### JERROD CARMICHAEL

California's new pay transparency law went into effect Jan. 1, and the Golden Globe Awards host celebrated by roasting his bosses for the night and telling the world that he was paid $500,000 for his services. Not only did the declaration raise eyebrows — it's 30 times the typical pay for emceeing the Oscars — but it undoubtedly angered anyone involved with keeping these pricey telecasts going amid steep ratings declines. Comedy reps will be quoting Carmichael's alleged payday in hosting negotiations for years to come.

**SAVE YOUR TEARS AWARD**

### BRENDAN FRASER AND KE HUY QUAN

What was in the water on the set of *Encino Man*? In an awards cycle where acceptance speeches bounced from sincere to silly to crass, these onetime co-stars stayed the course with wet, wet gratitude. And it's not like anybody begrudges them! Fraser's comeback in *The Whale* and Quan's return for *Everything Everywhere All at Once* have been the feel-good narratives of the season. But, as category frontrunners, there's genuine concern they might be all dried out by Oscar night.

**DANIEL DAY-LEWIS TAKING METHOD TOO FAR PRIZE**

### AUSTIN BUTLER

The supermarket checkout tabloids were right all along. **Elvis Presley** is still alive, conveniently hiding in the 31-year-old actor who brought him to the big screen in the **Baz Luhrmann** movie about the legendary singer's life. Butler's inability to shed the deep voice he took on to play the King started as a charming awards season bit and has since become a tedious cause for concern, but perhaps the real reason he remains hoarse two years after filming wrapped is because he keeps being forced to talk about it.

**OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN SOCIAL NETWORKING**

### MARY McCORMACK

Not since **Jesse Eisenberg** stepped into **Mark Zuckerberg**'s "fuck-you flip-flops" has the internet done more for an Oscar campaign. **Andrea Riseborough**'s A-lister-endorsed best actress nomination for little-seen *To Leslie* made her the most talked-about individual in any race. And while **Jennifer Aniston** and **Charlize Theron** got tied up in these knotted grass roots, it was McCormack (*To Leslie* director **Michael Morris**' wife) who truly rallied the voting troops. She may have a future as a strategist.

**JAMES CORDEN AWARD FOR THEATER KID FATIGUE**

### ARIANA DeBOSE

Other than New York's August Wilson Theatre, where **Lea Michele** may be belting "Don't Rain on My Parade" at this very moment, nowhere are you likely to find a better example of unchecked theater kid enthusiasm than DeBose's bizarre BAFTA-opening rap. The reception was politely mixed — except in Britain, where the number sparked a rare deviation in manners — but it's a reminder to everyone that you should never break into original song unless your lyrics have been rigorously focus-grouped.

**SELF-SABOTAGING MISOGYNY AWARD**

### ANDREW DOMINIK

Say what you want about *Blonde*, his much-maligned movie about **Marilyn Monroe**, but it was always in the awards conversation. The film could have done better than its lone Oscar nomination for star **Ana de Armas**. But Dominik, who displayed little sympathy for his tragic heroine in the film or its press tour — going so far as to call Monroe a "well-dressed whore" in one interview — shot himself in the foot every time he got the chance. Godspeed to the next studio to finance this bro.

**ANIMAL OVER-EXPOSURE AWARD**

### DONKEYS

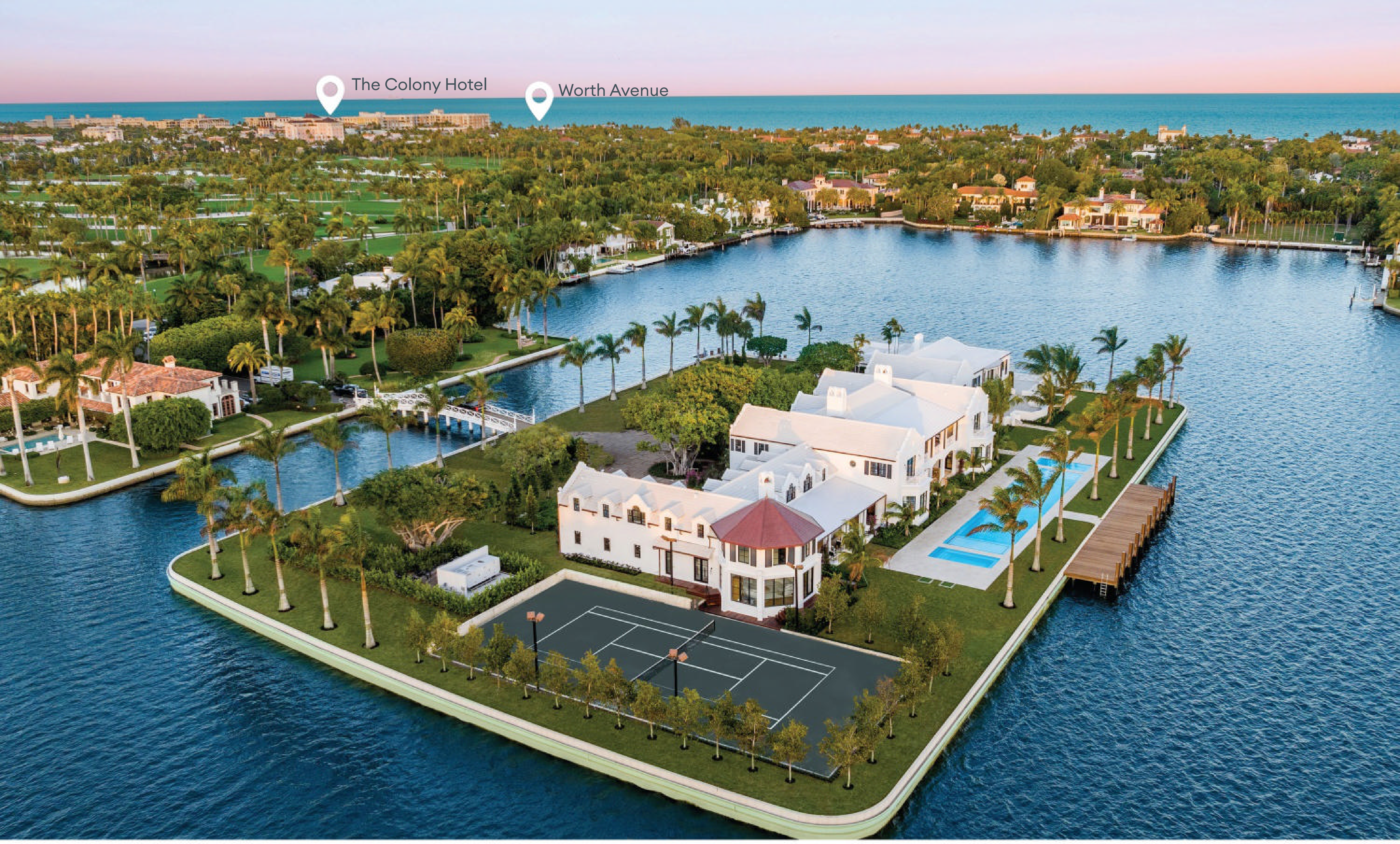
The lobbyists for Big Donkey earned their keep in 2022. Filmmakers were casting the diminutive equines like they were going extinct — appearing in best picture nominees *The Banshees of Inisherin* and *Triangle of Sadness*, as well as starring in Poland's international feature nominee *EO*. Now, instead of the glue factory, these screen vets will be competing for overalls at Netflix.

**ULTIMATE AWARDS SEASON WINNER**

### WILL SMITH

Let's get this straight: In the wake of The Slap and his resulting decade-long Oscar ban, **Will Smith** appeared in public only three times in a year, barely campaigned for his starring role in *Emancipation* and *still won two awards* — the NAACP Image Award and the AAFCA Beacon Award. Most people pound the pavement and glad-hand for months for far less, so consider this the season's most unlikely master class.

CARMICHAEL: RICH POLK/NBC VIA GETTY IMAGES. MCCORMACK: JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES. FRASER: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES FOR CRITICS CHOICE ASSOCIATION. QUAN: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES. DEBOSE: STUART WILSON/BAFTA/GETTY IMAGES FOR BAFTA. CORDEN: DAVE J HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES. DAY-LEWIS: JIM SPELLMAN/WIREIMAGE. BUTLER: GILBERT FLORES/VARIETY VIA GETTY IMAGES. DOMINIK: DANIELE VENTURELLI/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE RED SEA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL. SMITH: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE. DONKEY, CASH: ADOBE STOCK. BILLS: ISTOCK.



# Palm Beach's Only Private Island.

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# Yes, I Did Say That!

A look at who's saying what in entertainment

Compiled by Mikey O'Connell

## "You will never see me on Oprah or Gayle, crying."

**CHRIS ROCK**

The comic, in his Netflix special *Selective Outrage*, railing against Will Smith in his first televised comments about the Oscar slap — though he was quick to assert he's "not a victim."

## "There's a misconception that we all wish it wasn't still the good old days in cable. Of course we do."

**CHRIS MCCARTHY**

The Paramount Media Networks president and CEO, to *Vulture*, attempting to clarify and correct the assumption that his and other companies are thrilled about the challenging shift to streaming.

## "Let's go give them hell."

**DANIEL KWAN**

The filmmaker, at the WGA Awards, using his win for *Everything Everywhere All at Once* to tell other writers to "get involved" ahead of the union's upcoming negotiations.

## "Never have I felt more supported or respected in a creative space."

**LILY-ROSE DEPP**

The actress, in a widely shared statement, responding to a *Rolling Stone* report of unprofessionalism and "torture porn" rewrites on the set of *The Idol* — her upcoming HBO show created by Sam Levinson and The Weeknd. (The network also rebuffed the claims.)

## "I couldn't unhear it."

**CHRIS PINE**

The actor, in *Esquire*, explaining that he trimmed his long hair because his publicist said he looked like "Rachel from *Friends*."

## "Awards shows are dead. My 2-year-old watches slime videos with more views than the Oscars."

**HASAN MINHAJ**

The Independent Spirit Awards host, during his monologue, mocking the fact that IFC opted not to air the March 4 event — showing 2008 Will Ferrell comedy *Semi-Pro* instead.

## "OK, this is what it feels like."

**MICHAEL B. JORDAN**

The actor, at the *Creed III* premiere, introducing the screening of his new movie as a first-time director.

## "Mommy goes to bed early."

**JAMIE LEE CURTIS**

The actress, speaking with *THR*, explaining her plan to skip the private March 9 dinner for Oscar nominees: "There is nothing good happening with me after 9 p.m."

## FLASHBACK! Did I Really Say That?

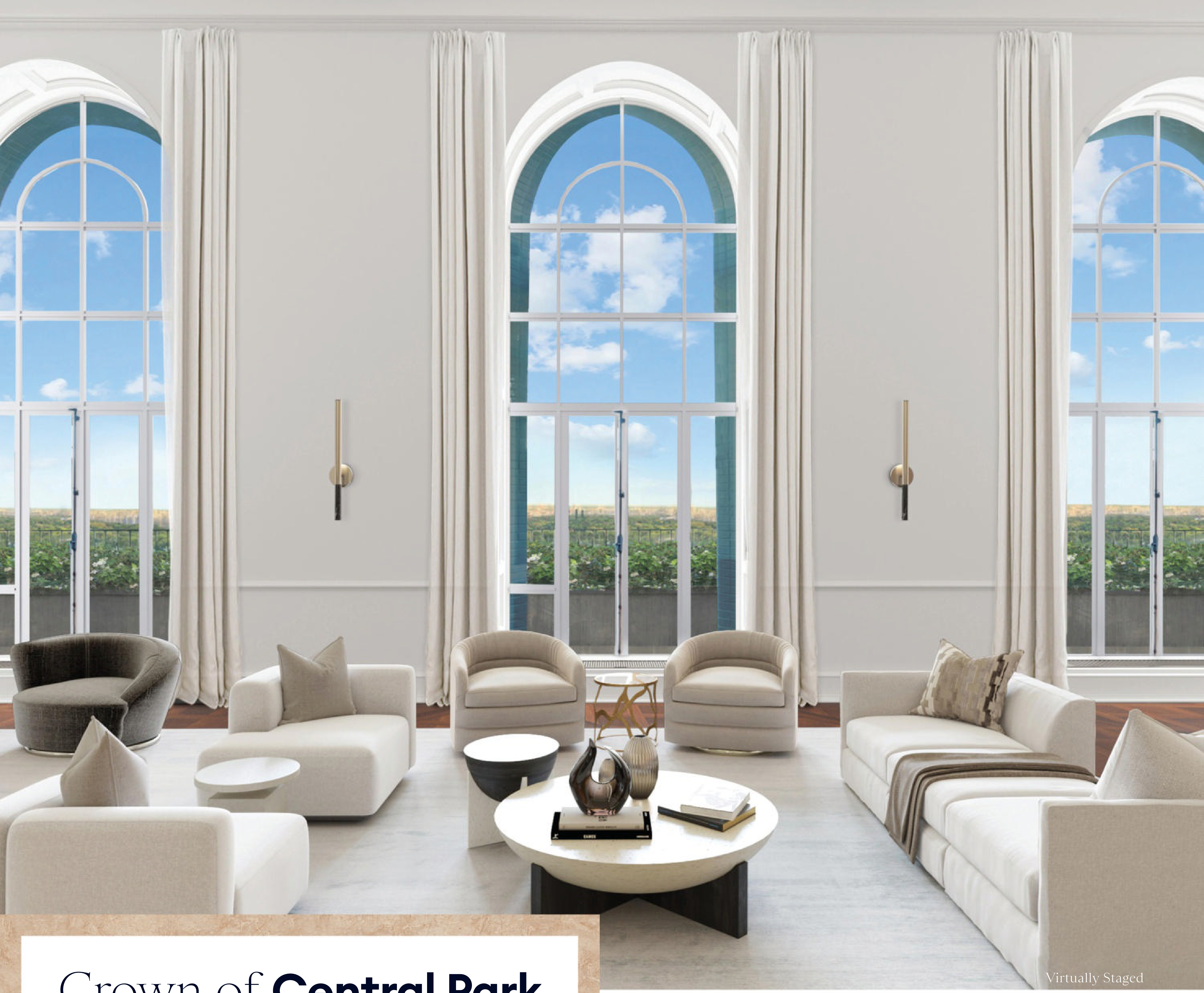
**APRIL 10, 2014**

## "We have to live with who we get."

**RUPERT MURDOCH**

News Corp's exec chair was noncommittal about his stake in the outcome of the 2016 election with *Fortune*. As Dominion Voting Systems pursues a $1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News for its coverage of the 2020 election, a Feb. 27 filing reveals that Murdoch asked CEO Suzanne Scott to have hosts support GOP candidates: "We cannot lose the Senate."

ROCK: MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES. DEPP: EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES. MINHAJ: MAT HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES FOR ADIDAS BASKETBALL. CURTIS: AMANDA EDWARDS/GETTY IMAGES. MURDOCH: C FLANIGAN/FILMMAGIC.



# Crown of **Central Park**

**150 Central Park South, 27th Floor | $30,000,000**
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The equine star of *The Banshees of Inisherin* is enjoying her retirement in an undisclosed location.

# Rambling Reporter

By Chris Gardner

### Where in the World Is Jenny the Donkey?

She's one of the most talked-about stars of awards season, yet **Jenny** the miniature donkey — who went hoof-to-toe with **Colin Farrell**, **Brendan Gleeson**, **Barry Keoghan** and **Kerry Condon** in *The Banshees of Inisherin* — has been absent from the campaign trail. After filming, she's said to be enjoying early retirement at a sanctuary in Ireland, paid for by the movie's producers. ("We just didn't want her to be doing any shit films," director **Martin McDonagh** once said to *THR*.) Finding itself on the Emerald Isle, *THR* hoped to track Jenny down so she could receive at least some of the attention. Searchlight Pictures, the local film board, *Banshees*' producers and local industry folk were contacted, but no luck. (One publicist deceptively claimed there "wasn't time" on the schedule for a meeting.) As an insider who worked on the film says, "Her location is very much a closely guarded secret." An exec also admits they "want her to enjoy her retirement in peace." — ALEX RITMAN

### *The Young and the Restless* Cast Digs Up Past

*Y&R*'s Melody Thomas Scott unearthed an old issue of *THR.*

A dozen actors from *The Young and the Restless* marked the soap opera's 50th anniversary March 1 by doing something that can't happen every day: unearthing a time capsule that was buried on the CBS Television City lot for 25 years. Interred on March 26, 1998, it contained merch, scripts, faux newspaper clippings from the *Genoa City Chronicle*, two *Y&R* books by **Mary Cassata** and **Barbara Irwin** (who flew down for the event) and the last IBM Selectric typewriter ball used by head writer **Kay Alden** before they switched to computers. "I've been here 44 of those 50 years," **Melody Thomas Scott** tells *THR* of playing Nikki Newman since 1979. "We beat astronomical odds to still be here and still be No. 1."

### Why Reese Witherspoon Is Ms. Tambourine Woman

**Reese Witherspoon** played it cool when asked by *THR* at the *Daisy Jones & The Six* premiere what advice she'd given members of the creative team behind her company Hello Sunshine's high-profile adaptation of **Taylor Jenkins Reid**'s best-selling novel. "I had some notes," she said with a smile before reluctantly revealing a few tidbits. "But they were the same notes as the rest of the creative team — about wanting to make sure that the documentary scenes felt as potent as the live footage." Witherspoon insists she mostly let the filmmakers do their thing. "These people know exactly what they're doing — they really didn't need anything from me." But if they ever needed her to jump in front of the camera, she'd be game. "One prerequisite for every project that we do [at Hello Sunshine] is: Would I want to be in it? I desperately wanted to be in this project, but there's nothing for me to play. I would even play the tambourine in this because I love it so much."

Reese Witherspoon

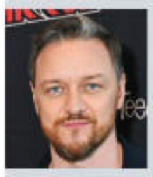
From left: Jamie Lee Curtis, Michelle Yeoh, Daniel Kwan, Stephanie Hsu, Jonathan Wang, Daniel Scheinert and Ke Huy Quan.

### Red Carpet

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* continued its awards season domination at the Film Independent Spirit Awards on March 4, picking up seven wins, including best feature, best performance for **Michelle Yeoh** and **Ke Huy Quan**, best breakthrough performance for **Stephanie Hsu** and best director for **Daniels**. "Thank you to everybody who makes crazy-weird independent movies," co-director **Daniel Scheinert** said. "Those movies changed my life." The show, hosted by **Hasan Minhaj**, also recognized (not-very-indie) TV winners *The Bear* and *Abbott Elementary* and their respective stars, **Ayo Edebiri** and **Quinta Brunson**. — KIRSTEN CHUBA

### Power Dining

Markle



McAvoy

**Meghan Markle** and **Prince Harry** had a rare night out at San Vicente Bungalows. … **Jamie Lee Curtis** and **Melanie Griffith** brunched at the Beverly Hills Hotel. … **Jennifer Hudson** and **Common** shared a meal at Nobu Malibu. … **Kate Hudson** and stylist **Jamie Mizrahi** stopped by Sunset Tower. … **Kanye West** visited Culver City's Carasau Cafe. … In New York, **James McAvoy** and wife **Lisa Liberati** celebrated **Tan France** and **Gigi Hadid**'s Netflix show *Next in Fashion* at Zero Bond. … **Hugh Jackman** paid a visit to Cucina Alba. … **Robert Pattinson** was spotted at Walker's.

HOT NEW RESTAURANT

### *Negroni*

**The Quick Pitch**

The Latin American bistro and bar brand, founded in Buenos Aires by **Pablo Sartori**, has opened its first West Coast restaurant in Beverly Grove. The L.A. outpost has a sleek facade with an equally hip menu, inspired by Argentinian cuisine's Italian and Nikkei influences. From sushi and truffle pasta to wagyu burgers and empanadas, the variety of food is outdone only by the range of negronis, with unique twists on the original — like one made with mezcal and green chartreuse. ***8022 W. 3rd St.***

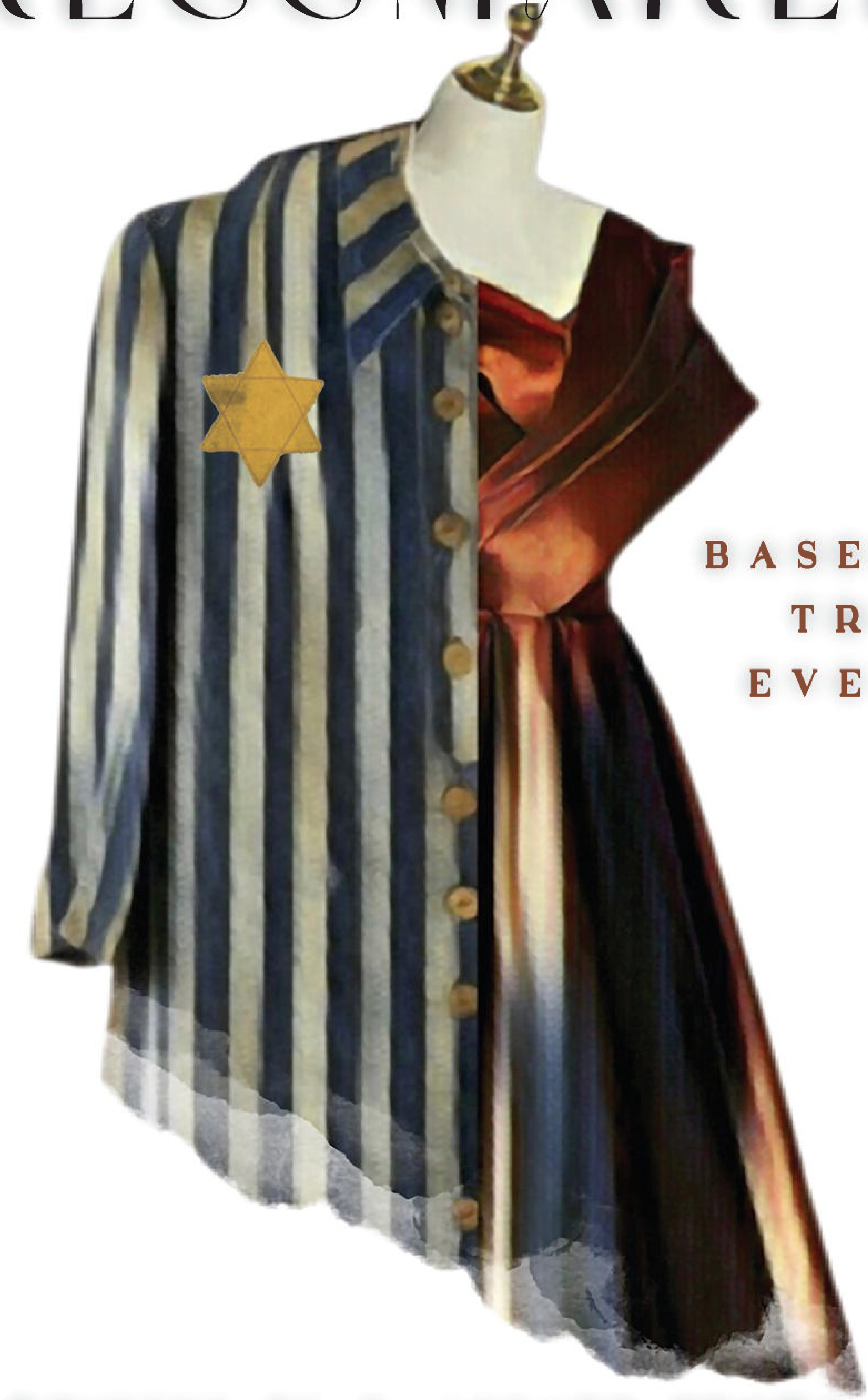
— EVAN NICOLE BROWN

**Got tips?** Email **rambling@thr.com**

MAP, MAGNIFYING GLASS: ADOBE STOCK. DONKEY: COURTESY OF SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES. THOMAS SCOTT: SONJA FLEMMING/CBS. WITHERSPOON: JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES. MARKLE: KARWAI TANG/WIREIMAGE. MCAVOY: CRAIG BARRITT/GETTY IMAGES FOR REEDPOP. NEGRON: JAKOB LAYMAN. CURTIS: EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES.

COMING 2024

# THE DRESSMAKERS



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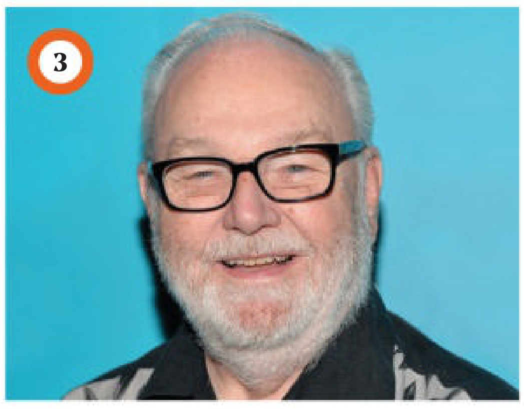

**1** Bresha Webb and Nick Jones Jr. **2** India Alexandra Desai **3** Burny Mattinson

# Hitched, Hatched, Hired

Inside the industry's celebrations and news

## Weddings

*Run the World* actress **Bresha Webb** wed TV writer **Nick Jones Jr.** at the Beverly Hills Hotel on Feb. 4. After marrying in front of 140 guests, including **Kelly Rowland**, **Marlon Wayans** and **Loni Love**, the couple honeymooned in Hawaii.

## Births

**Hrishikesh Desai**, a TV agent at CAA, and **Justine Roach**, a school counselor and therapist, welcomed **India Alexandra Desai** on Jan. 19 at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

## Congrats

**Courtenay Valenti** was hired as head of film, streaming and theatrical at Amazon Studios and MGM on Feb. 28.

**John Hesling** was named executive vp and head of Fox Alternative Entertainment on March 1.

**Scott Tenley** was promoted to CEO of production company MRC on March 2.

**Sandra Lindala** was appointed vp of the character FX company MastersFX on March 1.

**Benjamin Jenkins** and **Benjamin Potter** were upped to partners at entertainment law firm Gang Tyre on Feb. 23.

Hearst Corp. promoted **Jordan Wertlieb** to COO and **Michael Hayes** to president of Hearst Television on Feb. 28.

Former Sony exec **Nick Phillips** was named head of production at Yale Entertainment on March 2.

**Jenelle Lindsay** joined production company Avalon as executive vp television March 2.

**Eli Velazquez** was tapped to lead Telemundo Deportes, the sports division of NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises, on March 2.

**Mayowa Arogundade** was appointed creative director for media company EVGLE on Feb. 27.

Rhodes

Former CBS News president **David Rhodes** was tapped as executive chairman of Sky News Group on Feb. 27.

**Michael P. O'Leary** was named president and CEO of the National Association of Theatre Owners on March 2.

Nelson

**Anne Nelson** was hired to head the new UTA Fashion division Feb. 28.

**Ash Sarohia** was tapped as executive vp narrative film and television for Concordia Studio on Feb. 28.

## Deaths

**Burny Mattinson**, who worked as an animator, director, producer and story artist during a 70-year career as the longest-serving "castmember" in Disney history, died Feb. 27 in Los Angeles. He was 87.

**Tom Sizemore**, who starred in *Saving Private Ryan*, *Heat* and *Black Hawk Down*, died March 3 in Burbank after suffering a stroke and brain aneurysm. He was 61.

**Ricou Browning**, who played the Gill-Man in *Creature From the Black Lagoon* and was the creative force behind *Flipper*, died Feb. 27 in Southwest Ranches, Florida. He was 93.

**Jay Weston**, who produced *Lady Sings the Blues* and Billy Wilder's final feature, *Buddy Buddy*, died Feb. 28 in Woodland Hills. He was 93.

**Wayne Shorter**, the influential jazz innovator and saxophonist, died March 2 in Los Angeles. He was 89.

**Ted Donaldson**, who starred on the radio in *Father Knows Best* and in the film *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, died March 1 in Los Angeles of complications from a fall. He was 89.

## Birthdays

**MARCH 8**
Kit Connor, 19
Freddie Prinze Jr., 47

**MARCH 9**
Oscar Isaac, 44 →
Brittany Snow, 37

**MARCH 10**
Bad Bunny, 29
Jon Hamm, 52
Sharon Stone, 65
Olivia Wilde, 39

**MARCH 11**
Jodie Comer, 30
Terrence Howard, 54
Johnny Knoxville, 52

**MARCH 12**
Liza Minnelli, 77
Courtney B. Vance, 63

**MARCH 13**
Common, 51
Jack Harlow, 25
William H. Macy, 73

To submit, send email to **hhh@thr.com**

JONES JR.: JOHN AND JOSEPH PHOTOGRAPHY. DESAI: COURTESY OF SUBJECT. MATTINSON: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/WIREIMAGE. RHODES: COURTESY OF SKY NEWS. NELSON: COURTESY OF UTA. ISAAC: MONICA SCHIPPER/GETTY IMAGES FOR NETFLIX.

THE
Joyce Rey
TEAM

PURVEYORS OF DISTINGUISHED LIFESTYLES

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# The Business

Creative Space

## Chad Stahelski

The *John Wick* filmmaker on the Oscars' aversion to a stunts category and how real guns still end up on sets: 'It comes down to the fact that it would cost certain people a great deal of money to switch over' **By Mikey O'Connell**

Chad Stahelski was photographed Feb. 26 at the 87Eleven Action Design gym in Inglewood.

Photographed by **Yasara Gunawardena**

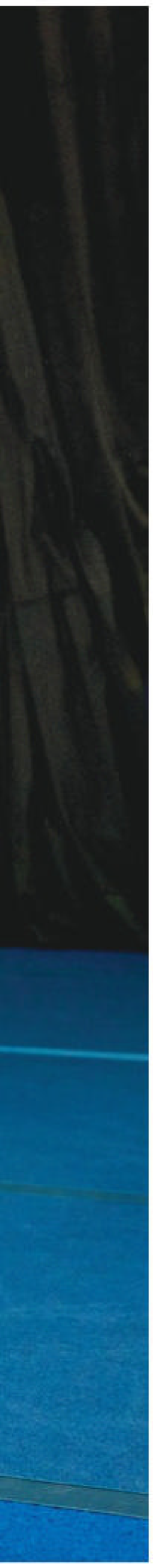
Few, if any, stunt doubles go on to direct their A-list counterparts in a string of blockbusters, but that's been the curious trajectory of Chad Stahelski. The exceptionally fit filmmaker, who stood in for Keanu Reeves in the first *Matrix* movie before becoming the trilogy's martial arts coordinator, has now collaborated with the star for each movie in the *John Wick* franchise — the latest of which, *John Wick: Chapter 4*, lands in theaters March 24.

But the Massachusetts-bred Stahelski has much more on his plate than the hit-man film series, which has grossed $586 million. In addition to managing the production company 87Eleven Entertainment in Manhattan Beach, he's also got 87Eleven Action Design in nearby Inglewood. The training house he co-founded with fellow stuntman turned director David Leitch back in 1997 has prepped countless actors for such films as *The Hunger Games, The Avengers* and even *Anchorman 2.* Piping in from his office in late February, Stahelski reflected on a life spent coaxing celebrities into stunts and offered his experienced take on why firearms have no place on a Hollywood set.

**The *John Wick* movies have doubled their gross with each installment. Any thoughts on how you've grown the audience?**

If you had given me $200 million after the first movie, which we made for nothing, I would've mucked it up. I've been part of so many second units and reshoots of big franchises, and they all go to shit. So, we watched the other franchises that threw money at just paying everybody more or on a couple bigger explosions. It's great for the trailer, but there's no meat on the bone. Then we

JOHN MURRAY CLOSE/LIONSGATE.



decided to spend what extra money we got to go shoot in three or four countries and be very careful in our casting. I'm a huge Sergio Leone fan, and there's not a movie he's done where every little character isn't great. That's what I want.

**I noticed that Eva Longoria was an executive producer on the first. How did that happen?**
The first *John Wick* was independent, and someone went to her with it as an investment opportunity. When Dave Leitch and I were filming, we didn't even know about it. We didn't meet her until well after the movie came out. We eventually met her at Chateau Marmont for lunch one day, and she's like, "Hi, I'm Eva. Isn't this the weirdest thing?" We actually made her a bunch of money, which is awesome, so she felt like she should take us to lunch.

**You have a long list of projects in development or preproduction — *Highlander, Ghost of Tsushima* and *Rainbow Six*, among many others. Is this franchise keeping you from doing other stuff?**
Hollywood loves a good announcement, don't they? There have been a few that have come out, and I've been surprised to see I'm attached to direct them. (*Laughs.*) Really, though, there's a lot I'm interested in. But the *Wicks* are so intense, and I like being part of all of it. I've tried to be the multitasker director — prepping one thing while working on another — but I can't. That's why they start stacking up.

**Keanu, Charlize Theron and Tom Cruise get a lot of attention for doing so many of their own stunts. Who else impresses you?**
87Eleven works on far more movies than I direct, so we get to see who's really excited about stunts. Bob Odenkirk was training at our facility when he was doing *Nobody*. He didn't come from an athletic background, and he was in his 50s when he started training, but he came in with such fervor. But we get a lot of people like that: Matt Damon, Hugh Jackman, Chris Hemsworth, Halle Berry.

GUERRILLA
JOHN WICK
THANK YOU
Fuck Yeah!

From left: Bucherer watches were gifted to those who worked on the first three *Wick* films; Reeves presents stunt staff with customized gi accompanied by the actor's training nunchucks.

**Halle Berry seems game for stunts.**
Funny story … I got a call from WME, when we were still writing *John Wick 3*, like, "What do you think of Halle Berry?" Well, she's awesome. She's Halle Berry. And then they said, "She's coming to see you. Today." And I swear to you, that afternoon I get a knock on the door, and it's Halle Berry. She's didn't miss a beat and said, "I'm just coming to see you because I'm going to be in your next movie." I'm like, "Are you?" Straight face she says, "Yes, and I'm going to train my ass off."

**How often does eagerness turn to anxiety when you get in the gym?**
All the time, with even an experienced cast. Not many of us feel natural standing 200 feet above the ground or having 40 cars drive by you at 30 miles an hour.

**So how do you get them there?**
It's mental. Ninety percent of the drills we do are memory-based. If you can't remember five moves, it doesn't matter how good you do the first four. It's the same for the great dancers, like Fred Astaire. You've got to remember the whole take, so it's about getting people to retain what they've learned on set. When Keanu trains in the gym, he sees everyone's faces. On the shoot, it's ninja mode. Everyone's in the dark. Lights are flaring. Guns are going off. You don't know who's who.

**What did you learn from working with the Wachowskis over so many years and projects?**
We actually put a line in the new movie: "How you do anything is how you do everything." I'm sure they say it a little bit more eloquently, but that is a Wachowski mantra. They care about it all. There is no detail too small. There is no, "Hurry up. Just get it done." There is only, "Get it perfect." Ask anybody that went through the three *Matrix* films. Out of the 11 department heads, I think all 11 and all of their seconds-in-command are at the top of their field right now. That's not an accident.

**So much of your job is about safety, and you started your career in 1994 doubling for Brandon Lee after he died in an on-set accident with a gun while filming *The Crow*. How did you process the *Rust* shooting?**
What happened on *Rust* … I wasn't there, but the accidents that I've been around, seen or been part of have always been human error. It's never mechanical. So, let's just talk about firearms. Back in the day, when it all started, they came up with blanks. A blank is a bullet without the projectile, but they couldn't put you and me in the same shot, 5 feet apart, and one of us pull the trigger. The concussive force coming out at the end of the barrel would be enough to shatter your skull. Accidents like that did happen and people died because of it. But in the past 10 years, they've come out with electronic guns, plug guns where it is impossible for anything to come out of the barrel and [it's] total CG. That's the way we do it. That technology is out there for everybody.

**Why isn't everybody using it?**
My feeling is that there's no reason to have a live firearm on set. We can create cities and spaceships and Godzilla and all these things. We have the technology to do the same with firearms. But, for the last 100 years, Hollywood's been using real firearms. And for prop houses, armorers or supply houses to switch over, it would make their entire stock of real firearms useless. It comes down to the fact that it would cost certain people a great deal of money to switch over. No one wants to say that, but that's the real reason. You don't need firearms. The alternative is just going to cost you more money.

**What's your take on the stunt community never getting its own Oscar category?**
There's one for every other department but ours? That's a no-brainer to me. Truly, there are wives' tales and rumors and myths about why there's no category, that the Academy was mad at somebody about something. For all I know, that's all bullshit. We want to be recognized because we're one of the 11 main departments. We're in every fucking trailer. Most movies are sold on what we do.

---

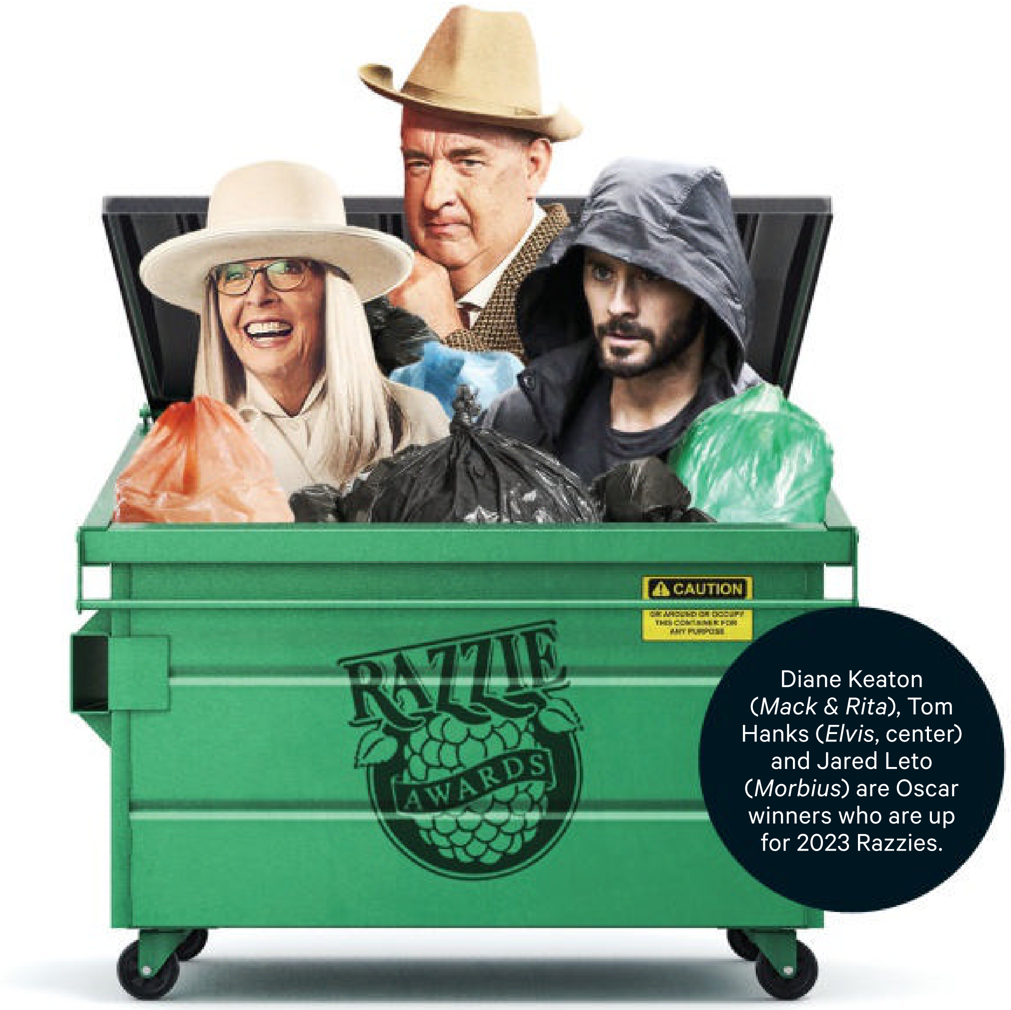
*Interview edited for length and clarity.*

Keanu Reeves (left, in *John Wick: Chapter 4*) came to the franchise with ample martial arts training, though he'd never worked with nunchucks until Stahelski gave him a pair: "I said, 'These are for you. Don't knock yourself out.' "

**AWARDS** | **MIKEY O'CONNELL**

# The Razzies Get Razzed

The Golden Raspberry Awards have long undercut the industry's self-seriousness — but in our sensitive times, the organization has been forced to rethink its mission



Diane Keaton (*Mack & Rita*), Tom Hanks (*Elvis*, center) and Jared Leto (*Morbius*) are Oscar winners who are up for 2023 Razzies.

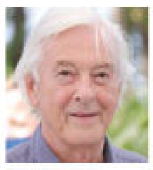
Hollywood's bloated egos require some manner of annual deflation, especially during Oscar season. For more than 40 years, that has been the objective of the Golden Raspberry Awards. The Razzies, as they're (un)affectionately known, have celebrated the best of the worst in film since 1980. The dubious honor has been accepted by such self-deprecating luminaries as Halle Berry (*Catwoman*), Ben Affleck (*Gigli*) and Sandra Bullock (*All About Steve*).

But evolving sensibilities have recently cast a shadow over the operation. In January, in response to social media backlash, the group rescinded its 2023 nomination of a 12-year-old actress (*Firestarter* star Ryan Kiera Armstrong). Not a year earlier, a fresh win for Bruce Willis and a decades-old nomination for Shelley Duvall were taken back — the former in light of his aphasia diagnosis and the latter for revelations of on-set mistreatment by *The Shining* director Stanley Kubrick. The Razzies began as a way to poke fun at fame. Today, that impulse has to be reconciled with a culture that shows little appetite for punching down.

"Our mission statement is bring humanity to celebrity," says Mo Murphy, who co-founded The Razzies with John J.B. Wilson. "We all make mistakes. Look at us. We're the Razzies. We stop, we reflect and we rectify. That's what we figure is our relevance: asking people to be as good as we know they can be."

Adds Wilson: "We don't consider ourselves a slap in the face. We look at ourselves as a banana peel on the floor. It's meant to evoke humor."

Not every dishonoree has taken the flatulent accolade in stride. Murphy and Wilson reference a distraught star whose publicist sent them to Disneyland the day of the awards to avoid news of an impending sweep. Sylvester Stallone was said to be none too pleased with his "worst actor of the century" title. And Eddie Murphy has been vocal about how his "worst actor of the decade" Razzie in 2010 inspired him to step back from acting.



Verhoeven

Still, it's hard to argue with some of their choices. The voting pool of just under 1,200 — six times the body that votes for the Golden Globes and one made up of anyone willing to pay $40 a year in dues — made Machine Gun Kelly's *Good Mourning*, which holds an extraordinary 0 percent on review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, a top nominee this year with seven nods. And in a slight, politically minded deviation, recent Razzies have targeted conspiracy theorist "documentaries" from election denier Mike "My Pillow Guy" Lindell and far-right provocateur Dinesh D'Souza. (In 2017, D'Souza accepted remotely and asked that his three trophies be sent to him. "It was the most expensive FedEx bill we ever had," says Wilson.)

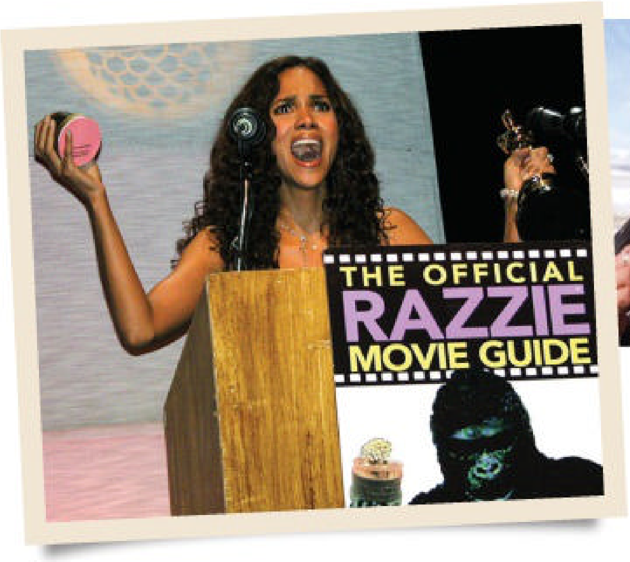
Embracing a Razzie isn't rare. Dwayne Johnson, good vibes personified, once shared a video accepting the award for his 2017 *Baywatch* remake. Filmmaker Paul Verhoeven was the first recipient to attend the in-person ceremony back in 1996. "I'd gotten a lot of bad reviews in Holland, so *Showgirls* was a confirmation that I'd become American," says the Amsterdam-born director. "I never cared too much about it because I had a feeling that they were wrong."

Accompanying a Dutch journalist to the event at the Hollywood Roosevelt, Verhoeven initially sat uncomfortably as the crowd jeered a clip of *Showgirls*' infamous pool sex scene. But as the audience began to realize his presence, boos turned to applause. He accepted each of the six wins, grabbing the same trophy — there was only one on hand — each time. "What started with so much negativity became enthusiastic and warm. I can concretely say that it was an essential moment in my career. The fact that the Razzies are still going, I applaud it." (Verhoeven continues to disagree with singling out actress Elizabeth Berkley. *Showgirls*' adverse impact on her career was immediate and, almost 30 years later, the Razzie is still salt in the wound.)

For all the recent online furor, no one thinks the Razzies are in any danger of going away. "Publicly, we're shifting away from being snarky and negative, but you couldn't tell from looking at our work Slack," says one awards strategist. "It's not like a Razzie ever ruined anybody's career. If anything, it gets more people to watch some movies that didn't do well."

The co-founders seem happy to evolve. They want to relaunch in-person ceremonies (which stopped well before the pandemic) and they seem confident that more nominees and winners will acknowledge being called out in the future. "It's an opportunity to defend the work or just own it," says Mo Murphy.

Whenever they next gather in person, Murphy and Wilson hope to extend an olive branch to Ryan Kiera Armstrong — whose rescinded nomination prompted them to set an age minimum of 18 for nominees. "Maybe she could give us the Razzie," adds Murphy. "We'll accept it."



Halle Berry (left) accepted her 2005 Razzie for *Catwoman*, Oscar in hand, with a spoof of her teary 2002 Academy Awards speech; Elizabeth Berkley (right) had no such accolades to cushion the blow of her *Showgirls* win.

BERRY: UPI PHOTO/BARBARA WILSON/GOLDEN RASPBERRY AWARD FOUNDATION/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. *SHOWGIRLS*: UNITED ARTISTS/EVERETT COLLECTION. *MACK*: GRAVITAS VENTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION. *ELVIS*: HUGH STEWART/WARNER BROS./EVERETT COLLECTION. *MORBIUS*: SONY PICTURES RELEASING/MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT/EVERETT COLLECTION. VERHOEVEN: ANDREAS RENTZ/GETTY IMAGES.

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OSCAR BALLOTS

# Brutally Honest Oscar Ballot

An Academy member, granted a cloak of anonymity, speaks candidly about his choices for the Oscars' top prizes **As told to Scott Feinberg**

*This year's Brutally Honest Balloter, a male member of the Academy's 867-person short films and feature animation branch, tells* THR *how — and why — he filled out his final Oscar ballot.*

### BEST PICTURE

A lot of the fanfare around *Avatar: The Way of Water* comes from the backstory — how long it took to make — rather than the actual quality of the movie. *Women Talking* was not bad; the acting and directing were really good, but I didn't love it. [Steven] Spielberg did his Spielberg thing and directed the hell out of *The Fabelmans*, but it was a little long. *Triangle of Sadness* was so funny and well-written, and I love its commentary about class — the best since *Parasite*. Cate [Blanchett] was absolutely incredible in *Tár*, but the movie takes too long to get to its point. *Top Gun: Maverick* was a fantastic thrill ride and it got people back into movie theaters and I'm glad it's nominated, but the story is pretty simple and straightforward, and I was weirded out by the faceless-enemy aspect of it. Austin [Butler] was so mind-blowing in *Elvis* that I watched it multiple times; the movie was fun, but it's all about the performance. *The Banshees of Inisherin* was so good, with a really funny and concise script. But for me, it's a very close call between *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. *All Quiet* is one of the best anti-war movies ever made. It made me feel the dirtiness and grittiness and nastiness of war; it really put you in the fucking trenches. *Everything Everywhere* is, as a filmmaker, one of the most inspiring things I've ever seen. It makes me believe that it's possible not to have an *Avatar*-size budget and not be Steven Spielberg and still make something that's personal and cultural and can still be a potential best picture Oscar winner.

**VOTE** (1) *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2) *All Quiet on the Western Front* (3) *The Banshees of Inisherin* (4) *Elvis* (5) *Top Gun: Maverick* (6) *Tár* (7) *Triangle of Sadness* (8) *The Fabelmans* (9) *Women Talking* (10) *Avatar: The Way of Water*

### BEST DIRECTOR

[Todd Field's] *Tár* is more about the performance than the directing, and [Martin McDonagh's] *Banshees* is more about the writing than the directing. Ruben [Östlund] put a real stamp on *Triangle*. Steven did an amazing job with *The Fabelmans*, and it's cool that it's such a personal story. But what the Daniels [Kwan and Scheinert] did across the board, with limited resources, was really remarkable.

**VOTE** Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

### BEST ACTOR

[*Aftersun*'s] Paul Mescal is a great actor, but I'm confused about all the excitement over that movie. Bill Nighy is so great in *Living*, and Colin [Farrell] is so great in *Banshees*. After I saw *The Whale*, Brendan Fraser was my choice. Then I watched *Elvis*, and I was so blown away by Austin's performance that I watched it again that same week. He's the clear winner, to me. If you're going to give Rami Malek an Oscar for *Bohemian Rhapsody*, when he wasn't even singing, then you can't not give it to Austin. This kid literally got a new voice!

**VOTE** Austin Butler, *Elvis*

### BEST ACTRESS

I would've definitely put Danielle Deadwyler [for *Till*] above Michelle Williams [for *The Fabelmans*] or Ana de Armas [for *Blonde*]. I'd heard about Andrea Riseborough and *To Leslie* before the noms, only because I kept seeing Academy members in that camp posting about it on social media. That didn't bother me at the time because it felt like it was going nowhere. Then, when she got nominated, I thought about it some more. The performance is great — not the greatest of all time, as Kate Winslet lied to me — but the way she was muscled in felt very Mafia-ish, like the people with the power decided that this should happen, so it did. For me, it was really close between Cate and [*Everything Everywhere*'s] Michelle [Yeoh]. Cate gets lost in Lydia Tár — it's such an incredible performance — but to see what Michelle, a woman who's so overdue, did in her movie, with the action and the fighting and the emotion? Tie goes to the person who hasn't won over the person who already has two.

**VOTE** Michelle Yeoh, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

### BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

*Causeway* was too slow, even though Brian Tyree [Henry] is incredible in everything. Judd Hirsch was great [in *The Fabelmans*], but that's such a small part that I was surprised he was even nominated. I don't know how to pick between the two *Banshees* guys [Barry Keoghan and Brendan Gleeson] — Brendan had a larger role, but Barry was so funny and scene-stealing. Ke Huy Quan was fantastic in *Everything Everywhere*, and his story makes you hopeful and reminds you that it's never really over in Hollywood unless you're dead or Will Smith.

**VOTE** Ke Huy Quan, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

### BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Kerry [Condon of *Banshees*] and Hong Chau [of *The Whale*] were fine. I think Jamie Lee Curtis could win for *Everything Everywhere* — she's been a part of Hollywood since she was a child — even though Stephanie Hsu was better in the movie. But I'm hoping that the Academy stops treating Marvel movies like second-class citizens and recognizes that Angela's [Bassett of *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*] performance is great — she performed the fuck out of that role — and that, considering her body of work, she's long overdue.

**VOTE** Angela Bassett, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*

*Find this voter's full ballot as well as other ballots at THR.com.*

Illustration by **Rami Niemi**

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# Style

Jewelry

1

2

3

## Dazzling Ice

**1** Inspired by overlapping waves, Chaumet's On the Water's Surface ring features 7.39 carats of white diamonds; price upon request, at *chaumet.com*
**2** A pair of cushion-cut diamonds totaling 10.08 carats each are surrounded by diamonds set in white gold on Chanel's Comète Constellation necklace; price upon request; at Chanel Fine Jewelry, Beverly Hills
**3** These sunray-inspired Piaget high-jewelry earrings spotlight a pair of pear-shaped diamonds; price upon request, at Piaget, Beverly Hills
**4** Knife-edge settings and 12.51 carats of bezel-set diamonds are meant to evoke the atoms of a diamond under a microscope on the Atomique Cuff by De Beers Jewellers. **Ariana DeBose** wore the brand to the 2022 Oscars; $215,000, at De Beers Jewellers, New York

4

# Spectacular Sparkle for

9

10

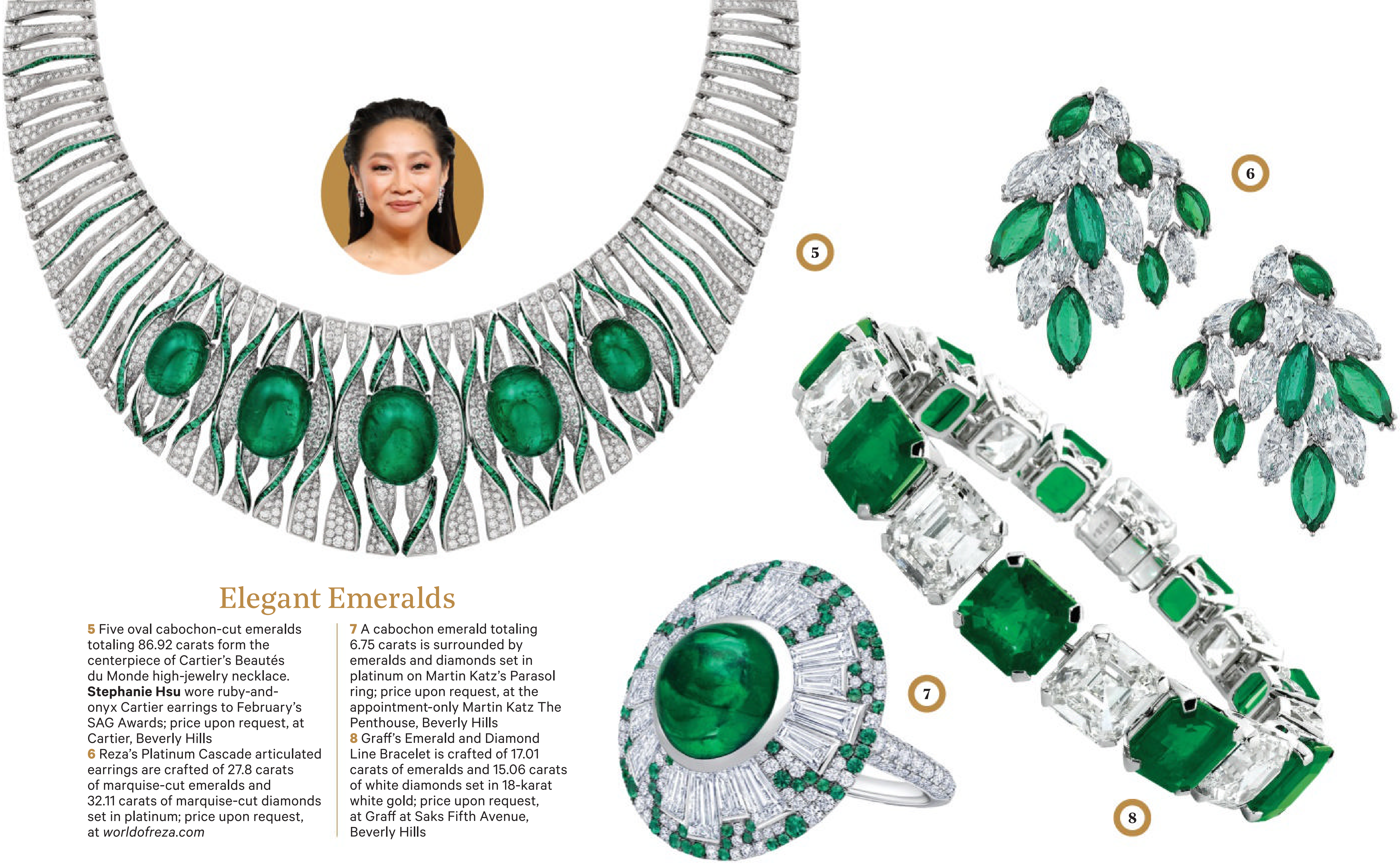
11

12

## Stunning Sapphires

**9** Amid diamonds and buff-top sapphires, a rare 107.15-carat cushion-cut sapphire is meant to evoke thoughts of Capri's Blue Grotto on this Eden Garden of Wonders high-jewelry necklace by Bulgari. **Gabrielle Union** wore the brand to the NAACP Image Awards in February; price upon request, at Bulgari, Beverly Hills
**10** Louis Vuitton's Spirit High Jewelry Liberty bracelet features a 4.6-carat Madagascar sapphire among white diamonds set in 18-karat white gold; price upon request, at Louis Vuitton, Beverly Hills
**11** Pear-shaped sapphires set in platinum are showcased on these high-jewelry earrings with round brilliant and marquise-cut diamonds by Harry Winston; price upon request, at Harry Winston, Beverly Hills
**12** Boucheron's latest high-jewelry collection is inspired by a brooch presented to then-Princess Elizabeth in 1944; this Hypnotic Blue ring, featuring a 6-carat cushion-cut sapphire surrounded by diamonds and set in 18-karat white gold, takes its cue from that design; price upon request, at Neiman Marcus, Beverly Hills

JEWELRY: COURTESY OF BRAND (16). DEBOSE: ANGELA WEISS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. UNION: ARNOLD TURNER/GETTY IMAGES FOR NAACP. DUNST: DAVID LIVINGSTON/GETTY IMAGES. HSU: FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES.



## Elegant Emeralds

**5** Five oval cabochon-cut emeralds totaling 86.92 carats form the centerpiece of Cartier's Beautés du Monde high-jewelry necklace. **Stephanie Hsu** wore ruby-and-onyx Cartier earrings to February's SAG Awards; price upon request, at Cartier, Beverly Hills

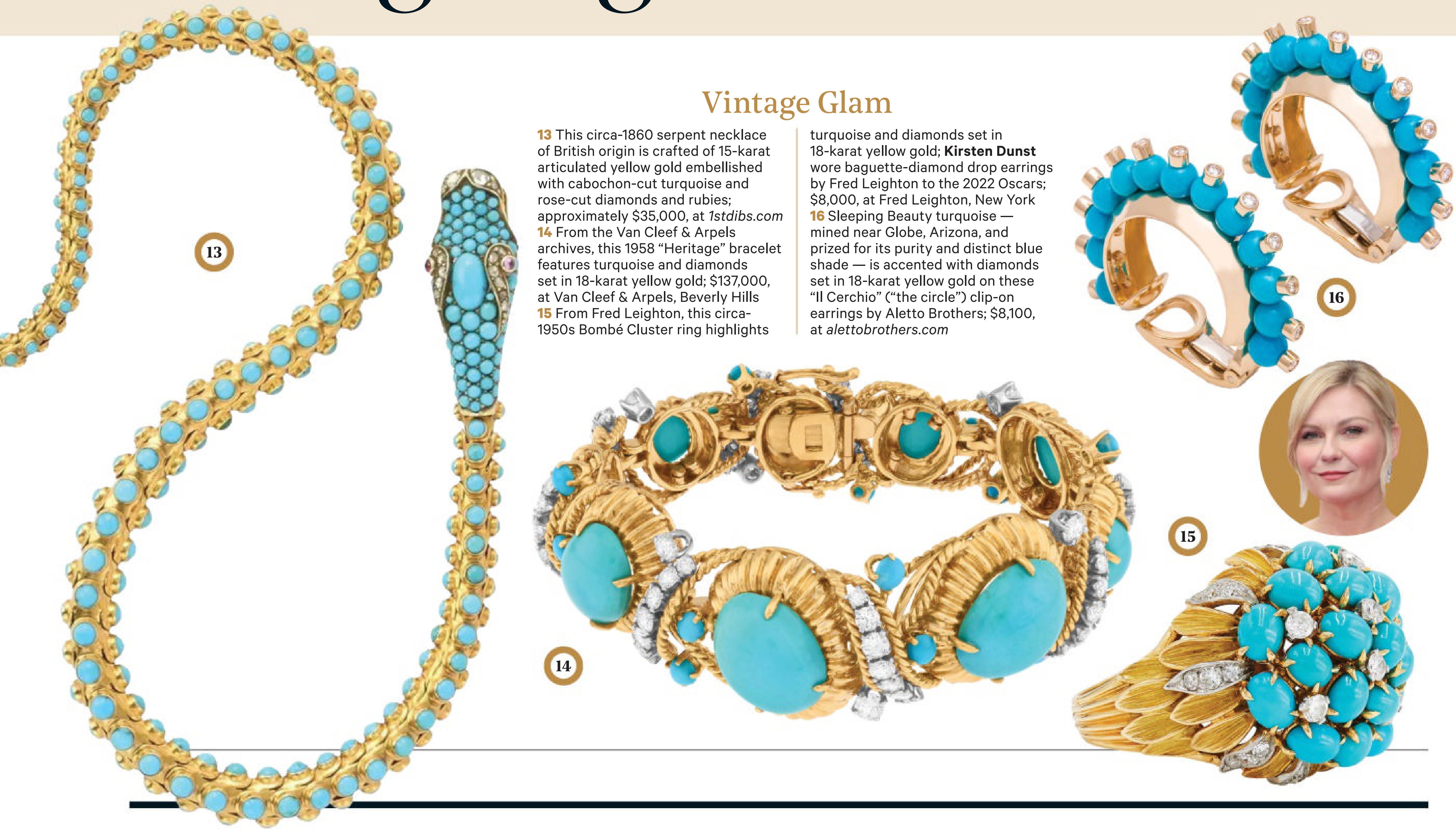
**6** Reza's Platinum Cascade articulated earrings are crafted of 27.8 carats of marquise-cut emeralds and 32.11 carats of marquise-cut diamonds set in platinum; price upon request, at *worldofreza.com*

**7** A cabochon emerald totaling 6.75 carats is surrounded by emeralds and diamonds set in platinum on Martin Katz's Parasol ring; price upon request, at the appointment-only Martin Katz The Penthouse, Beverly Hills

**8** Graff's Emerald and Diamond Line Bracelet is crafted of 17.01 carats of emeralds and 15.06 carats of white diamonds set in 18-karat white gold; price upon request, at Graff at Saks Fifth Avenue, Beverly Hills

# the Big Night

The latest and best new jewelry designs — such as these diamond, emerald and sapphire showstoppers (plus a dash of stunning vintage) — are sure to be a presence Oscar night on A-list actresses ***By Laurie Brookins***



## Vintage Glam

**13** This circa-1860 serpent necklace of British origin is crafted of 15-karat articulated yellow gold embellished with cabochon-cut turquoise and rose-cut diamonds and rubies; approximately $35,000, at *1stdibs.com*

**14** From the Van Cleef & Arpels archives, this 1958 "Heritage" bracelet features turquoise and diamonds set in 18-karat yellow gold; $137,000, at Van Cleef & Arpels, Beverly Hills

**15** From Fred Leighton, this circa-1950s Bombé Cluster ring highlights turquoise and diamonds set in 18-karat yellow gold; **Kirsten Dunst** wore baguette-diamond drop earrings by Fred Leighton to the 2022 Oscars; $8,000, at Fred Leighton, New York

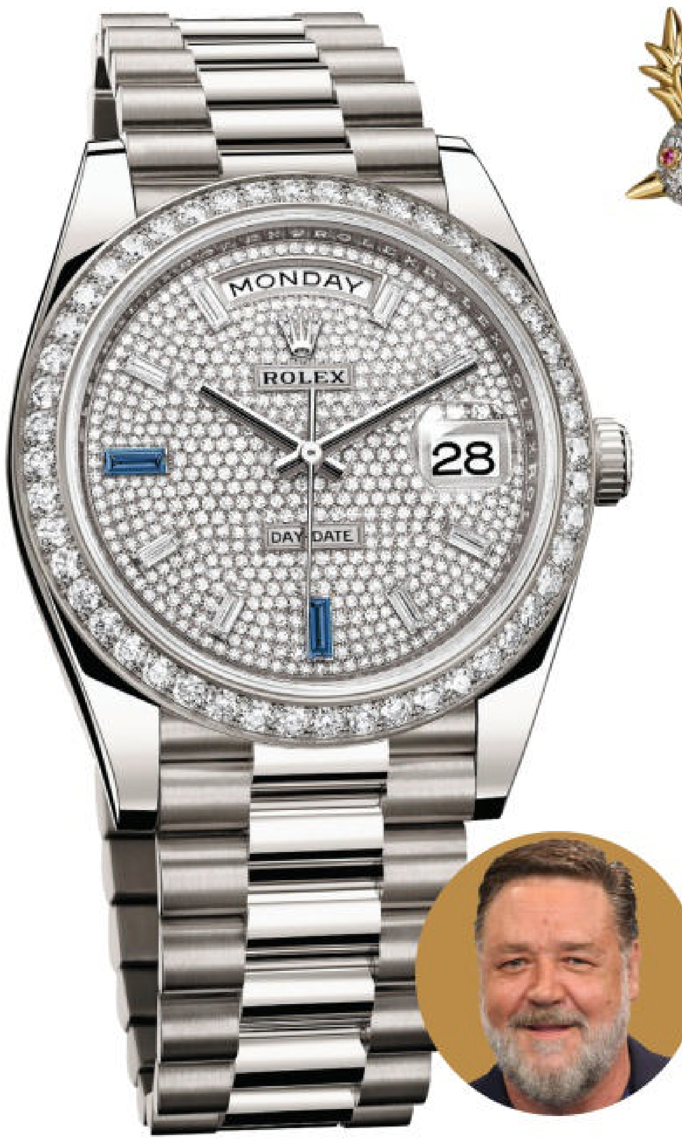
**16** Sleeping Beauty turquoise — mined near Globe, Arizona, and prized for its purity and distinct blue shade — is accented with diamonds set in 18-karat yellow gold on these "Il Cerchio" ("the circle") clip-on earrings by Aletto Brothers; $8,100, at *alettobrothers.com*

# Diamonds Are a Guy's Best Friend

For Hollywood's male stars who love adding a touch of sparkle for the red carpet, these embellished timepieces and jewels will make for perfectly brilliant accessories

*By Laurie Brookins*

**Gucci**
The high-jewelry white gold-and-diamond Solitaire ring showcases a heart-shaped tourmaline; price upon request, available exclusively at Gucci, Place Vendôme, Paris



**Rolex**
A diamond-pavé dial with diamond and sapphire hour markers, a diamond-set bezel and the brand's iconic President bracelet earn the spotlight on this 40mm Oyster Perpetual Day-Date in 18-karat white gold. Mark Wahlberg and **Russell Crowe** have been spotted in diamond-set Rolexes; price upon request, at the Rolex boutique at Gearys, Beverly Hills

**Tiffany & Co.**
Jean Schlumberger's iconic "Bird on a Rock" design gets an update with the "Bird on a Pearl" capsule collection, which includes this brooch crafted with a natural saltwater pearl below a diamond-embellished bird; price upon request, at Tiffany & Co., Beverly Hills

**Richard Mille**
The 18-karat red-gold case of the RM 17-01 Manual Winding Tourbillon is fully set with baguette-cut diamonds and surrounds a skeletonized dial with tourbillon; $1.52 million, at Richard Mille, Beverly Hills

**Jaeger-LeCoultre**
The red-gold 40mm Master Ultra Thin Tourbillon self-winding watch features a diamond-set bezel and tourbillon at 6 o'clock. **Nicholas Hoult** is a brand ambassador; $92,500, at Jaeger-LeCoultre, Beverly Hills

**Jacob & Co.**
Sixteen Ashoka-cut diamonds totaling 6.66 carats are set in 18-karat white gold on these cuff links with flip-back closure; $64,000, at Jacob & Co., New York

**Chopard**
Limited to eight pieces, the L.U.C. Flying T Twin Joaillerie timepiece features 32.45 carats of diamonds covering the dial and 42mm platinum case; price upon request, at Chopard, Beverly Hills

**Audemars Piguet**
The bezel on this white-gold 37mm Royal Oak Selfwinding timepiece is set with 32 baguette-cut diamonds, while the smoke-blue dial features diamond indices. **Trevor Noah** rocks AP; price upon request, at Audemars Piguet, Beverly Hills

CROWE: MARILLA SICILIA/ARCHIVIO MARILLA SICILIA/MONDADORI PORTFOLIO VIA GETTY IMAGES. HOULT: THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES. NOAH: JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC. JEWELRY/WATCHES: COURTESY OF BRAND (8).

# CONGRATULATIONS

## TO OUR ALUMNI OSCAR NOMINEES

**DANIEL KWAN '10 AND DANIEL SCHEINERT '09 (AKA THE DANIELS)**

Directors, *Everything Everywhere All At Once*
Best Picture, Best Director, Best Lead Actress,
Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress (2),
Best Original Screenplay, Best Film Editing,
Best Original Song, Best Costume Design,
Best Original Score

**ALEXANDRA MILCHAN '94**

Producer, *Tár*
Best Picture, Best Director, Best Lead Actress,
Best Original Screenplay, Best Cinematography,
Best Film Editing

## AND TO OUR ALUMNA GOLDEN GLOBE WINNER

**JENNIFER COOLIDGE '85**

Actress, *White Lotus*
Best Performance by an Actress in a
Supporting Role in a Limited Series/Anthology
or Motion Picture

Emerson
COLLEGE

**emerson.edu**

MY AESTHETIC

# Brian Tyree Henry Likes 'Everything to Pop'

The *Causeway* star, first-time Oscar nominee and 'sock freak' talks red carpets, sartorial icons (Miles Davis, Andre 3000) and his bold approach to personal style spotlighting bright colors and creative pairings: 'I never really try to be conventional' ***By Evan Nicole Brown***

**Brian Tyree Henry** makes an altar everywhere he goes. Oftentimes those sacred tableaux are fashioned from incense, candles and little totems that keep him grounded while traveling around the world to work on different projects.

The actor puts the same depth of feeling and intention into his portrayal of different characters, which has resulted this year in his first Academy Award nomination, for his performance opposite **Jennifer Lawrence** in *Causeway*, an intimate drama that explores humanity, trauma and the healing kindness of strangers. His character, James Aucoin, is a working-class New Orleans native "with a greasiness to him," Henry says, and is often seen wearing clothing and jewelry throughout the film that demonstrate his loyalty to home.

In the New Orleans-shot film, "all those T-shirts [I wore] were from local bars and shops ... I always want to make sure that any time I'm dressing as a character, I'm representing the place that I'm in, so I usually like to ingrain local brands, especially if they're Black-owned," says Henry, who adds that his best supporting actor nom "feels like it belongs to every single person who supported me and gets excited when they see that I'm a part of something."

Brian Tyree Henry, styled by Jennifer Austin, was photographed Feb. 14 at The Beverly Hilton, wearing a custom peak-lapel suit by Viggo (about $1,500, *viggo-tailoring.com*) and Jack Victor's Melbourne V-neck sweater in green ($258, *jackvictor.com*). Accessories include Maor's Unity Curb Link bracelet in silver and yellow gold ($8,870), Unity Curb Band Ring in silver ($675) and David Yurman's Revolution Chronograph watch in steel ($5,800, *davidyurman.com*).

Offscreen, the actor says that his personal style is inspired in part by the way that gentlemen in the 1960s used to mix materials like velour, cashmere and polyester in creative ways.

"I used to define my style as, 'Someone who gets dressed in the dark,' " Henry jokes. "I never really try to be conventional." The self-proclaimed "sock freak" (whose favorite brands are RoToTo and American Trench) also loves color, and shares that when he learned that his complexion has red and gold undertones, the spectrum of possibility for outfits opened

Photographed by **Birdie Thompson**

up. On the carpet for a *Bullet Train* screening in 2022, for example, he wore an avocado green suit, and at this year's Critics Choice awards, he wore a bold purple one. "Because of my dark complexion, the more vibrant the color, the better. I want everything to pop. I mean that's the beauty of our Black and brown skin — it really goes with anything."

When he's on the road, the actor — who grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C., and studied acting at Morehouse College and Yale — loves shopping in secondhand consignment stores in every city he visits. "[They] tell you a lot about the community," he says. And when he's not looking for vintage, Henry tends toward sporty clothing and accessories from brands like Double RL, Rowing Blazers, Aime Leon Dore, Rhude, Kith, Herschel and Telfar.

Bottom line is, he has no shortage of taste (or roles). Currently, Henry — who first broke out on FX's *Atlanta* — is filming the Apple TV+ drama *Sinking Spring* from fellow Oscar nominee **Peter Craig** (*Top Gun: Maverick*). The series marks Henry's first time as an executive producer. Other upcoming projects include *Flint Strong*, a biopic about Olympic boxer **Claressa Shields**; a crime thriller for FX called *Class of '09*; and a voice role in *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*.

Henry's been busy, but not too busy to sit down with *THR* and share some of his style faves and inspirations, as well as reflections on this major career moment.

**What has your approach been to dressing for this awards season, as well as generally in your career?**

[People] spend a lot of time seeing me in different characters — like Alfred [in *Atlanta*], Lemon [in *Bullet Train*], James Oakland [in *Causeway*] — so when I'm able to be me, I really want to make sure that I am showing me, and that there's a complete difference. I want to show that I like things fitted, tailored, textured, patterned. I'm not a conventional shape that most people want to dress, most people will be like, "Oh, you can either go dowdy or you have to go baggy," but I don't care about that. I love every curve that I have. I love the build that I am, and I want to make sure I accentuate all those things. So that leaves me a lot of room to play.

**I know that you self-style sometimes. How do you navigate styling yourself versus choosing the right opportunities to work with a stylist?**

I've been fortunate enough to work with this amazing stylist **Jennifer Austin** recently on a few carpets, and she really understands my concept of wanting to do bold colors, of wanting to do things that are kind of mix-and-match, but also very sleek. But when it comes to self-styling, I just want to feel playful, I want people to feel like I can leave this talk show, then come and sit down and have dinner with them, but also go in the street and just kick it. I just always want my essence of style to feel like me and for people to feel like they kind of know me.

**I'm really interested in regionalism — where we're from impacts who we are and how we express ourselves so much. Not only are you from the South, but a lot of your projects are set in the environment of the South as well. How has it influenced your style?**

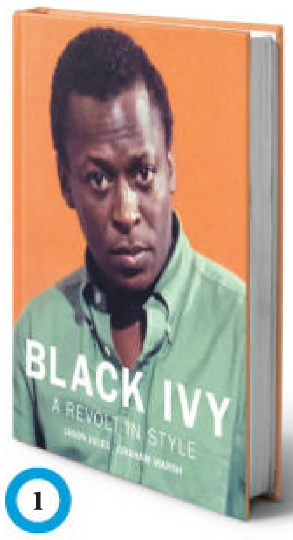
There's a richness to the South — there's a richness to Blacks from the South — especially because there's a history and ancestry there that can't be denied. The food, the smells, the clothing, all of that is so ingrained in who we are. We're innovators. And I really love that about the South because back in the day, the South wasn't the place with Rodeo Drives — we didn't really have access to a lot of those expensive things. Everything was pretty much just the department store in your town, so you had to come up with your own true sense of style and fashion. I feel like that's something that's really hard for me to let go of now because I still have that sensibility.

**Do you know what you're wearing to the Oscars yet? How does this moment feel?**

This is a moment that you think about as an actor … the amazing honor that is an Academy Award nomination, and then you immediately go, "What am I

## Five of His Essentials

**1** *Black Ivy: A Revolt in Style*, $50, *reelartpress.com*
**2** Sennheiser's HD 800 S headphones, $1,600, *sennheiser-hearing.com*
**3** Fazeek's teak, neroli and cedar incense cones; $39, *endclothing.com*. Henry's self-care musts also include House of Intuition candles, Le Mieux's Iso-Rose Hydrating Mist, Bask & Bloom's Ease leave-in conditioner, Lush's Lemony Butter hand cream, and Jo Malone's Oud & Bergamot cologne.
**4** Large Duffle from New York-based, Black-owned brand Telfar, $450, *telfar.net* (currently sold out)
**5** Tom Ford's Liam sunglasses, $570, *tomford.com*



1

2

CHARCOAL INCENSE
teak + neroli + cedarleaf

3

4

5

## Standout Red Carpet Looks

As one of the stars of 2018's *If Beale Street Could Talk*, Henry attended the Oscars for the first time in 2019. The actor dressed in Giorgio Armani, including a black velvet evening jacket.

He self-styled for a 2022 screening of *Causeway*, playing with patterned items including an MCM scarf and Todd Snyder flannel shirt, paired with a Schott Perfecto motorcycle jacket.

Henry opted for bright color at the 2023 Critics Choice Awards, wearing a plum suit by Viggo with a contrasting white shirt and Italian shoemaker Scarosso's Leandro tassel loafers.

For the AARP Movies for Grownups Awards in January, he wore the Bordeaux double-breasted, shawl-collar wool suit by L.A.-based Grayscale, a velvet tie and jewelry by David Yurman.

At the Oscar Nominees Luncheon in February, Henry looked elegant in a custom lavender three-piece Dzojchen suit with kimono-inspired belting. He also wore loafers by Santoni.

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"I don't ever want to come off like I'm too high end," says Henry, wearing a Ralph Lauren Purple Label wool topcoat (price upon request, *ralphlauren.com*), Jack Victor's Solid Sage five-pocket pant ($228, *jackvictor.com*) and Mount Stephen Basketweave turtleneck sweater ($348).

going to wear?" Because of how unconventional I am, I'm not really worried about who's willing to dress me. [But] I saw some sketches recently. I can't reveal who [the suit] is with just yet, but I will tell you that it will be a moment. It will reflect exactly who I am and will reflect what this moment means. It's really classic, sleek, neat.

**What did the process of developing the wardrobe for your character in *Causeway* involve?**
The biggest thing about my character James is that he's a native: born and raised in New Orleans, never left New Orleans. And not only that, but he went through such a traumatic incident that kind of kept him trapped in a certain way. And not only trapped, but also stuck in the era of when that tragedy [happened]. … So if you notice with him, he's usually in dark colors. He's in a uniform, mostly because he works at the auto body shop. But he's also disabled and missing a limb. He's an amputee, so you're never really going to see him in shorts or anything tight. Also, the humidity of New Orleans is really real, it's the realest thing on earth. And we were filming this in the summer. You'd always see him with the handkerchief in his back pocket to wipe the sweat. I'm always thinking about things like that. How my characters walk, what they wear.

Henry with Jennifer Lawrence in a scene from A24 and Apple TV+'s *Causeway.*

**What's something you bought recently and loved or something you're coveting that you hope to purchase soon?**
I really want a Rolex Oyster watch, I can't lie … and a vintage one. Because I'm like, "I have to celebrate this Oscar nomination somehow! I should probably get a Rolex!" That's something I've been wanting for a long time.

**Who are some of your style icons?**
I think about **Miles Davis** back in the day — there's this amazing book called *Black Ivy* that is about the style of these wonderful, amazing Black artists and musicians that I have on my coffee table at home. It's just the smoothest style, effortless. **Marvin Gaye** is also one of my favorite style icons. And I can't even lie: **Andre 3000**. At the end of the day, his style is always very seamless and experimental but also so indicative of who he is.

**Do you have any hobbies outside of acting?**
I'm actually a pin collector. My favorite thing is to go on Etsy and just scroll. I have this really amazing MCM backpack that I love, and I have pins on it.

**Is there a piece of advice you've gotten that really sticks with you?**
My mother used to have this phrase that she would say, and it was, "Let go or be dragged." Now that I'm older and have gone through quite a few obstacles in my life, I finally understand what she meant by that, because we have a tendency to hold on to things that don't serve us. And so it just basically means that you can hold on if you want to, but it will take a lot out of you. Who wants to go through life feeling like they're being pulled?

---

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*

CAUSEWAY: WILSON WEBB/APPLE TV+.

# 2023 ICG Publicists Awards Nominees

THE BEVERLY HILTON HOTEL • FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2023

## TELEVISION SHOWPERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD

**Quinta Brunson**

## The Maxwell Weinberg Award for Motion Picture Publicity Campaign

| | |
|---|---|
| **Avatar: The Way of Water** | 20th Century Studios |
| **ELVIS** | Warner Bros. Pictures |
| **Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery** | Netflix |
| **Nope** | Universal Pictures/MonkeyPaw Productions |
| **Top Gun: Maverick** | Paramount Pictures/Skydance/Jerry Bruckheimer Films |
| **The Woman King** | TriStar Pictures/Entertainment One |

## The Maxwell Weinberg Award for Television Publicity Campaign

| | |
|---|---|
| **Abbott Elementary** | Warner Bros. Television/ABC |
| **Ghosts** | CBS Studios/CBS |
| **Prey** | 20th Century Studios/Hulu |
| **RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars** | MTV Entertainment Studios/Paramount+ |
| **Star Trek: Strange New Worlds** | CBS Studios/Paramount+ |

## Publicist of the Year Award

| | |
|---|---|
| **Michelle Alt** | Paramount Pictures |
| **Heidi Falconer** | Unit Publicist |
| **James Ferrera** | Unit Publicist |
| **Sara Hull** | Walt Disney Studios |
| **Gianluca Lignola** | Universal Studios |
| **Danielle Roque** | Paramount Pictures |

## Les Mason Award for Career Achievement in Publicity

| | |
|---|---|
| **Natalie Bjelalac** | Netflix |
| **Karen Chamberlain** | Warner Bros. |
| **Gabriela Gutentag** | Unit Publicist |
| **Carri McClure** | Unit Publicist |
| **Carol McConnaughey** | Unit Publicist |
| **Claire Raskind** | Unit Publicist |

## MOTION PICTURE SHOWPERSONS OF THE YEAR AWARD

**Jerry Bruckheimer**
**Tom Cruise**
**Christopher McQuarrie**
**David Ellison**

## International Media Award

| | |
|---|---|
| **Yong Chavez** | ABS-CBN News (Philippines) |
| **Dan Jolin** | Empire (UK) |
| **Garry Maddox** | Sydney Morning Herald (Australia) |
| **Zachary Ntim** | Deadline (UK) |
| **Helen O'Hara** | Empire (Northern Ireland) |
| **Adam Tanswell** | Total Film (UK) |

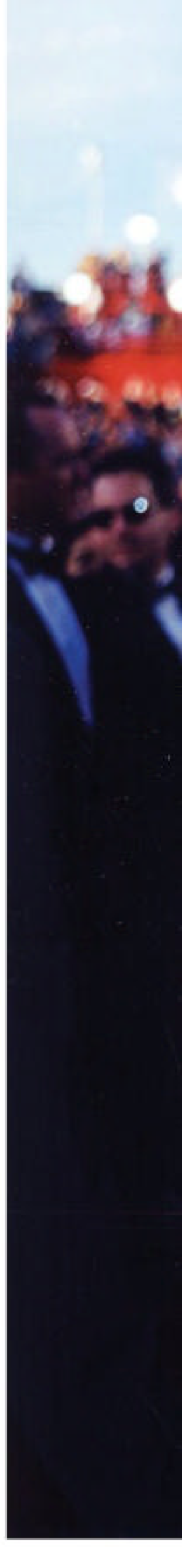
## Excellence in Unit Still Photography Awards for Motion Picture and Television

| For Motion Picture | For Television |
|---|---|
| **Eli Joshua Adé** | **Beth Dubber** |
| **Quantrell Colbert** | **Richard Foreman** |
| **Kevin Estrada** | **Hilary Bronwyn Gayle** |
| **Chiabella James** | **Justin Lubin** |
| **JoJo Whilden** | **Nicole Wilder** |

## Press Award

| | |
|---|---|
| **Erik Davis** | Fandango |
| **Angelique Jackson** | Variety |
| **Dave Morales** | KRIV-TV Houston |
| **Andy Reyes** | Entertainment Tonight |
| **Jazz Tangcay** | Variety |

**www.icg600.com**



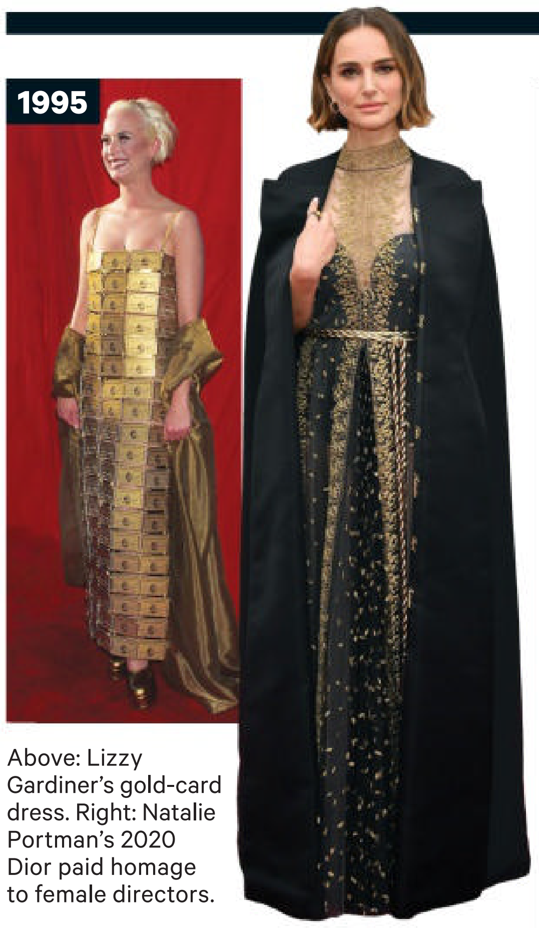
# *Back to the '90s and Aughts on the Red Carpet*

Three decades ago, the Academy Awards kicked off some critical style moments that reverberate today — think grunge slip dresses, one-of-a-kind vintage and high-low dressing: 'It's still so fresh' ***By Fawnia Soo Hoo***

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Academy Awards red carpet underwent a sea change. During the nascent era of the celebrity stylist, fearless stars not only began donning high-end designer labels (like awards show pioneer Armani) but also flouted traditional Oscar dress-code decorum in new ways, sometimes inviting the wrath of prevailing critics.

Among the looks that shook things up — and made an indelible impression on fashion and pop culture — were **Sharon Stone**'s proto-high-low dressing, **Jada Pinkett Smith**'s sensational two-piece set, actresses in one-of-a-kind vintage looks and a still controversial aughties affectation (the whale tail).

Nearly three decades later, the influence of the era's Oscar red carpet can be seen all over the TikTok generation, Fall 2023 runways and, yes, once again on recent awards-season red carpets.



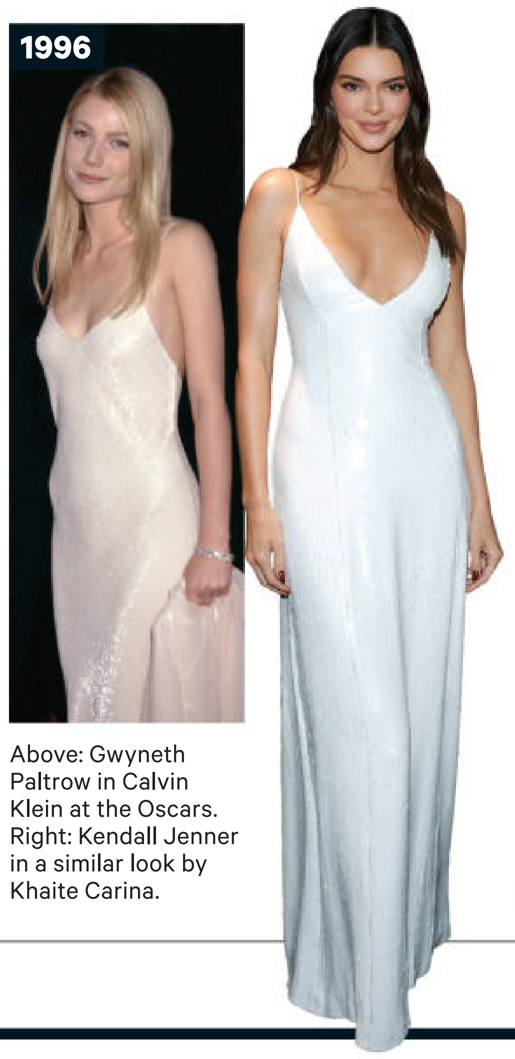
Above: Lizzy Gardiner's gold-card dress. Right: Natalie Portman's 2020 Dior paid homage to female directors.

## Sartorial Protest

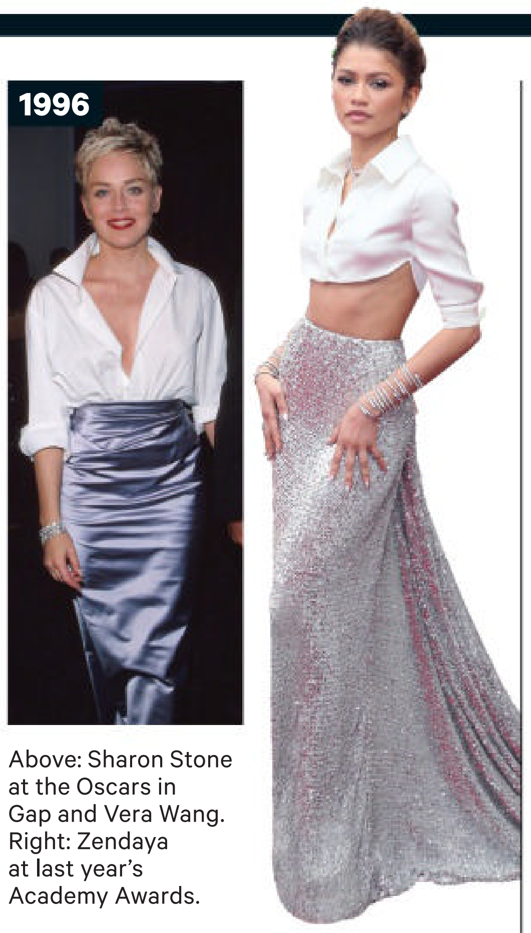
In 1995, **Lizzy Gardiner** accepted her Oscar in a gown she created out of 254 American Express gold cards. The *Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* costume designer made worst-dressed lists — and an audacious statement on a still pressing issue: socioeconomic disparity. "[The cards] said something about someone's wealth and standing," says Gardiner. Adds stylist **Zadrian Smith**, of duo Zadrian + Sarah, "It [was] a statement on class, commerce and social capital." Gardiner's look was a harbinger of a wave of recent red carpet looks that weave in messaging, from colleague **Jenny Beavan**'s tuxedo hand-painted to protest pay inequity last year to **Natalie Portman**'s 2020 Dior cape embroidered with the names of snubbed female directors.

## Grunge-Glam Slip Dresses

"If you remember, there was a little fashion moment with slip dresses, flip-flops and tousled hair," says stylist **Phillip Bloch** of the 1990s grunge trend, which was elevated at the Oscars by such stars as **Gwyneth Paltrow** (in beaded yet minimalist Calvin Klein); slip-dress queen **Courtney Love** (in bias-cut Versace); and **Salma Hayek** (in an Armani tank-style dress, with an **Audrey Hepburn**-referential tiara). "A slip dress can convey so many different points of view," says **Alexis Novak**, owner of Hollywood-loved company Tab Vintage, of the versatility of the revived trend, seen recently on **Olivia Rodrigo** (in a Miu Miu sheath at the Grammys) and **Kendall Jenner** (in Khaite Carina at the CFDA Awards).



Above: Gwyneth Paltrow in Calvin Klein at the Oscars. Right: Kendall Jenner in a similar look by Khaite Carina.



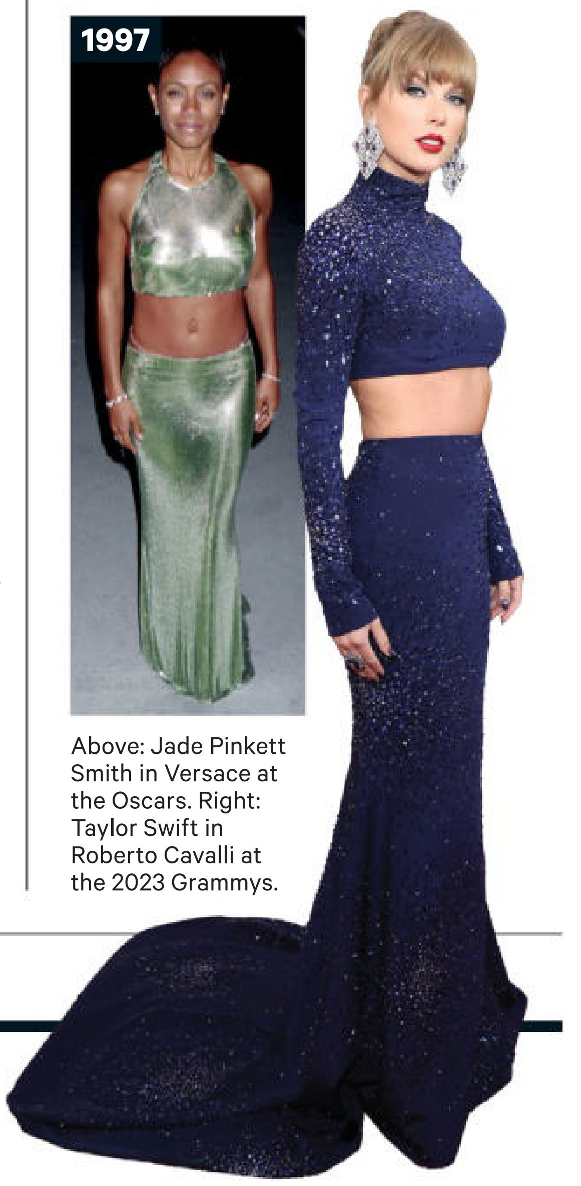
Above: Sharon Stone at the Oscars in Gap and Vera Wang. Right: Zendaya at last year's Academy Awards.

## High-Low Individualism

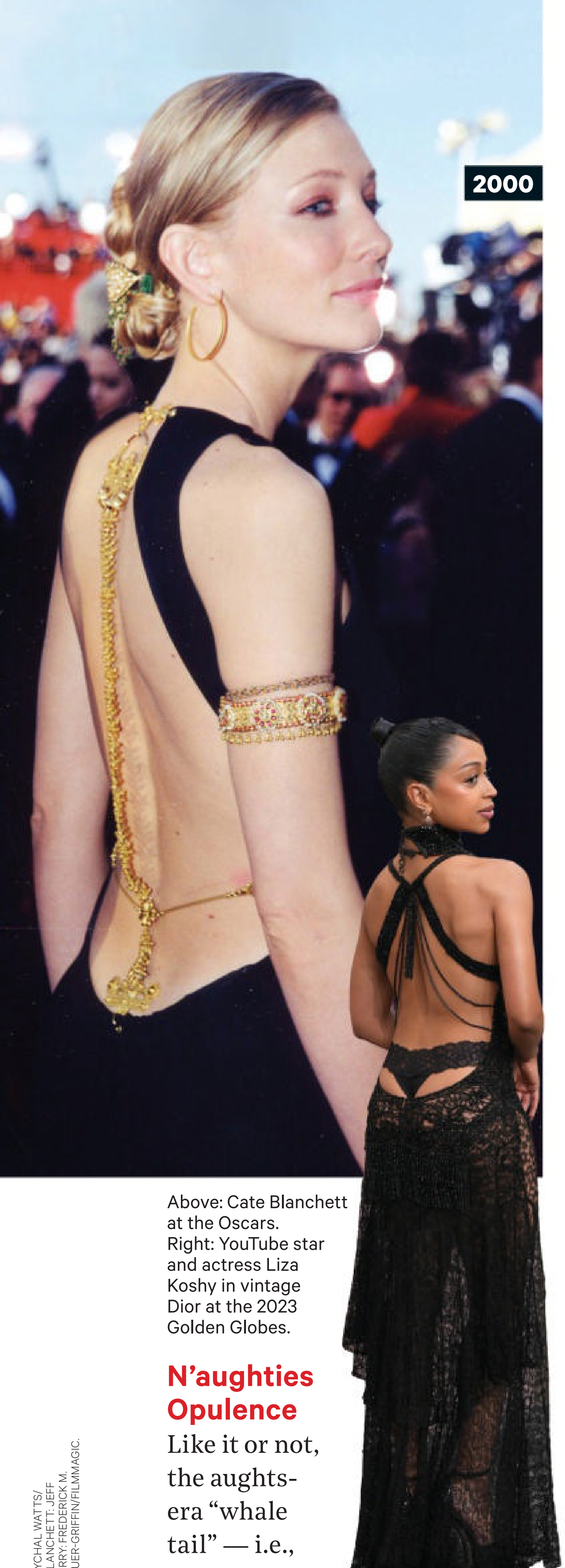
In 1996, a last-minute Oscars wardrobe crisis forced **Sharon Stone** to pull together a self-expressive and tradition-defying mix of her own wardrobe essentials: a black Gap turtleneck, a Valentino maxi skirt and a velvet Armani tuxedo dress. Two years later, she repeated the successful formula, pairing her then-husband's white Gap button-down with a lilac Vera Wang skirt. "High-low, high-low," intones Smith of Stone's dressing foresight — long before the term became popularized in everyday fashion lexicon. At the last Oscars, **Law Roach** dressed **Zendaya** in a Stone-referential Valentino Couture ensemble, while at this year's Critics Choice Awards, **Cate Blanchett**'s taupe shirt-and-skirt set by Max Mara also evoked Stone's insouciant approach.

## Belly-Baring Sets

For the 1997 Oscars, **Jada Pinkett Smith** wanted to look "modern, hip and cool," says Bloch, then her stylist. So he asked **Gianni Versace** to slash a shimmery green halter gown into a crop top and low-slung skirt. "She was the inspiration — 100 percent — Jada was Jada," recalls Bloch about Pinkett Smith's prescient vision. Fast-forward to 2023, and sets that bare midriffs are "so Gen Z," says Novak. Matching sets abound on *Euphoria*, while **Taylor Swift** stunned in a midriff-revealing Roberto Cavalli two-piece look at the Grammys. Among her clients, Novak notes a high demand for "1990s Jada Pinkett Smith" looks across the board: "Chain-mail anything, slinky anything. Lots and lots of skin."



Above: Jade Pinkett Smith in Versace at the Oscars. Right: Taylor Swift in Roberto Cavalli at the 2023 Grammys.



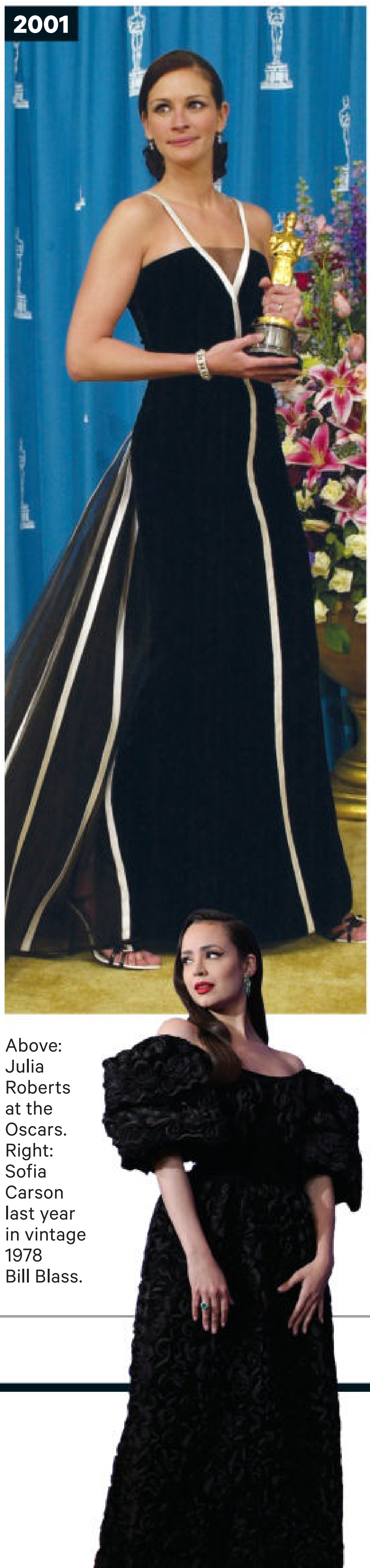
Above: Cate Blanchett at the Oscars. Right: YouTube star and actress Liza Koshy in vintage Dior at the 2023 Golden Globes.

## N'aughties Opulence

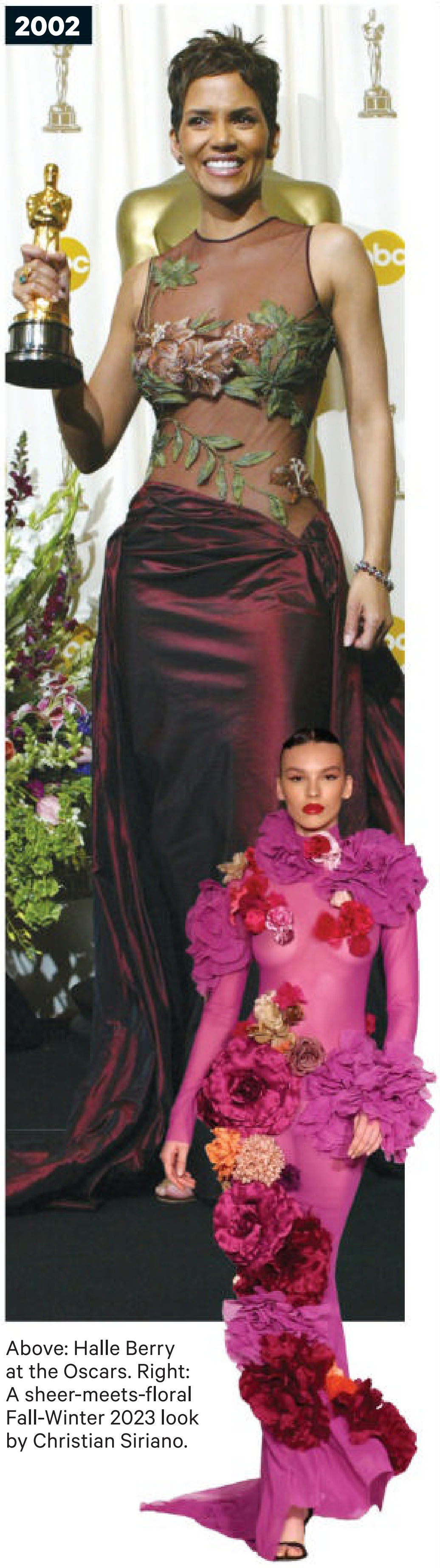
Like it or not, the aughts-era "whale tail" — i.e., an irreverently exposed G-string — returned with a vengeance around 2019, highlighted by **Hailey Bieber** wearing a pink trompe l'oeil interpretation at the Met Gala. But back in 2000, Blanchett sanctioned the cheeky flourish — commonplace at the MTV VMAs — for the esteemed Academy Awards. The low-plunge back on her Jean Paul Gaultier gown framed antique Indian jewels formed into a thong-referential shape by jeweler **Cynthia Bach** and stylist **Jessica Paster.** "It's classic business in the front and 'I do my own thing' from the back," says stylist **Sarah Edmiston**, of Zadrian + Sarah, noting that the look bespeaks "the contradictions of the woman in the contradictions of the dress."

## Vintage, Meet Sustainability

In 2001, **Renée Zellweger** generated headlines in a breathtaking 1950s lemon-yellow Jean Dessès gown from Lily et Cie. "Originals make history," says **Rita Watnick**, owner of Lily et Cie, one of Hollywood's vintage meccas. That same year, **Julia Roberts** accepted her Oscar in an archival 1992 Valentino Couture gown. At the time, "exclusivity" was one of the allures of one-of-a-kind vintage, recalls Watnick (who was also the source for **Jennifer Lopez**'s dreamily draped Jean Dessès dress for the 2006 Oscars). Now, with the world in the throes of climate disaster, a slew of stars — from Cannes to major awards shows — are falling for vintage. For many, it's because reuse sends a new message. "[They] are leading the charge of sustainable fashion," says Novak, "and showing it is cool to wear something again."



Above: Julia Roberts at the Oscars. Right: Sofia Carson last year in vintage 1978 Bill Blass.



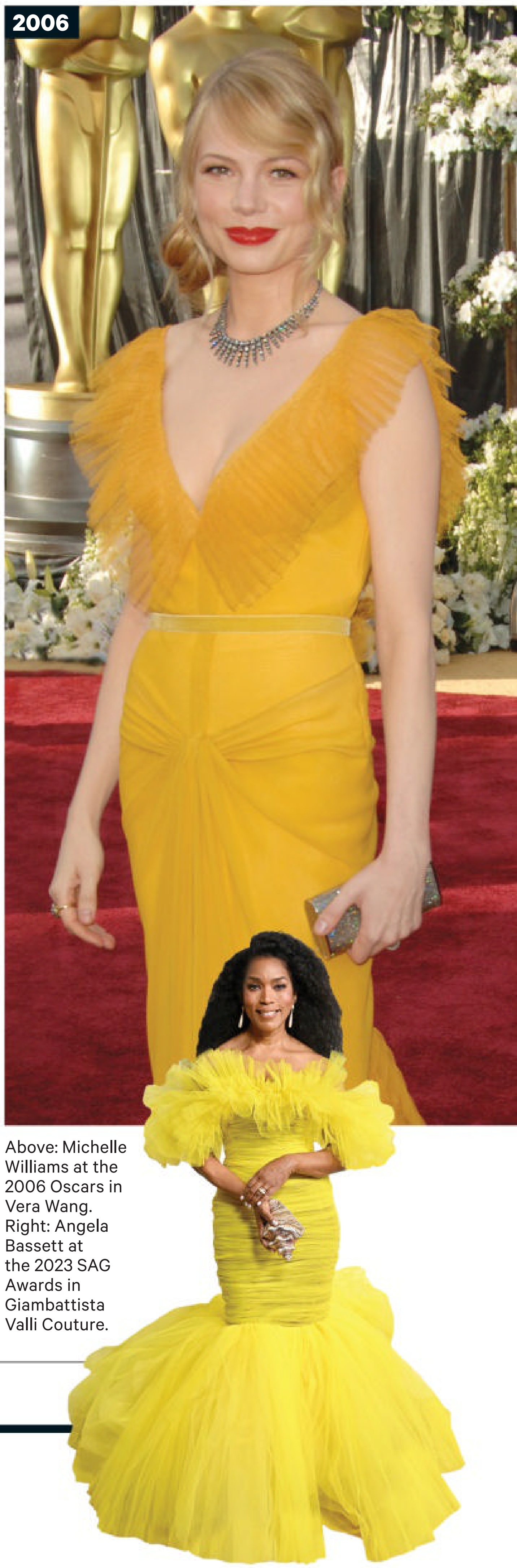
Above: Halle Berry at the Oscars. Right: A sheer-meets-floral Fall-Winter 2023 look by Christian Siriano.

## Sheer Winning Style

To recall **Halle Berry** making history as the first — and still only — Black woman to win the best actress Oscar, in 2002 for *Monster's Ball*, is to remember her moving tears and her trophy triumphantly raised in the air. She did it wearing an Elie Saab Couture gown with intricate floral embroidery on the sheer bodice. "We re-beaded it for the waist up because that's the shot," recalls Bloch. "Her dress was just so exquisite." Strategically placed adornments on illusion bodices — or entire dresses — made a return in the Fall 2023 collections, seen at runway presentations by Christian Siriano, Sandy Liang, Carolina Herrera, Naeem Khan and LaQuan Smith.

## Marigold Standard

"It was considered an unflattering color and a weird color for a red carpet gown, but it felt young and cool to us," says stylist **Kate Young**, looking back at the way **Michelle Williams** took a risk at the 2006 Oscars in a fluttery saffron Vera Wang dress. Well, the stunning shade of yellow is back and stronger than ever. As part of its Fall 2023 report, color authority Pantone just christened the hue "High Visibility." Marigold also brightened up Fall-Winter 2023 collections by Proenza Schouler, Burberry and Tanya Taylor. "It's still so fresh," says Novak. Yellow was a big trend at the 2023 SAG Awards as well, as seen on **Viola Davis**, **Angela Bassett** and **Niecy Nash.**



Above: Michelle Williams at the 2006 Oscars in Vera Wang. Right: Angela Bassett at the 2023 SAG Awards in Giambattista Valli Couture.

GARDINER: KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE. PORTMAN: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES. PALTROW: RON DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES. JENNER: JASON MENDEZ/GETTY IMAGES. STONE: MYCHAL WATTS/WIREIMAGE. ZENDAYA: DAVID LIVINGSTON/GETTY IMAGES. SMITH: JIM SMEAL/RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES. SWIFT: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES. BLANCHETT: JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC, INC. KOSHY: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES. ROBERTS: DAVID MCNEW/GETTY IMAGES. CARSON: MICHAEL LOCCISANO/GETTY IMAGES FOR CNN. BERRY: FREDERICK M. BROWN/GETTY IMAGES. SIRIANO DRESS: JP YIM/GETTY IMAGES FOR CHRISTIAN SIRIANO. WILLIAMS: FRANK TRAPPER/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES. BASSETT: AXELLE/BAUER-GRIFFIN/FILMMAGIC.

# *What Michelle Yeoh Taught Me About Mothers*

*THR*'s senior editor of diversity and inclusion reflects on how the Oscar nominee's life and roles have helped guide her own personal journey, both as a daughter and as a future parent: 'There's something about Yeoh as Mother that transcends' ***By Rebecca Sun***

At a stage that for most actresses signals the beginning of the end, it's perhaps no accident that **Michelle Yeoh** is reaching even higher heights, 40 years into her career. There's something about Yeoh as Mother that transcends, in every shading and variation: cool and elegant in *Crazy Rich Asians*, imperious and twisted in *Star Trek: Discovery*, harried and bewildered in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. In every version she is elementally familiar, particularly to my generation. She resembles the mother we have or the one we want, the kind we fear or crave, or both.

Four years ago, after I got engaged initially without my parents' blessing, I wrote about how *Crazy Rich Asians* brought painful clarity to my own standoff, caught between romance and family. Much of my epiphany was fueled by Yeoh's exquisite portrayal of Eleanor Young — her unyieldingly lofty standards for her child's welfare, and the child's realization that there could be no happy ending without her as part of it. When I interviewed Yeoh for *THR*'s 2018 cover story on the film, she told me she only took the role once assured that it would not play into one-dimensional stereotypes. In less capable and intuitive hands, Eleanor would be the story's easy villain. Instead, when I took my parents to see the film on opening weekend, my mom left the theater raving about the character's wisdom and strength and (to my chagrin at the time) found validation in their shared perspective. *EEAAO*'s downtrodden laundromat owner Evelyn Wang couldn't be more different from one-percenter Eleanor, but in her tenacity and insistence on chasing her daughter to the ends of the multiverse — chasms of culture and generations and literal rocks be damned — I saw yet another dimension of my dynamic with my mother playing out onscreen.

Both my mom and Yeoh exude a formidable presence that belies their petite stature, and although I've never witnessed the former deliver a literal beatdown to anyone, she has always been fearless in a confrontation and wields words as skillfully as a swordswoman does her saber. Her fortitude, both physical and mental, is superhuman, a 90-pound septuagenarian devoting her retirement years to caregiving for my father, who has Parkinson's. Despite that work's punishing demands, she has not sacrificed her style and *qi zhi* — a refined, graceful temperament — a quality that Yeoh, even as frumpy Evelyn, also radiates. Neither woman has ever been caught dead in a short, curly Asian mom perm.

*THR*'s Rebecca Sun (left) with her mother, Julie Sun, at home on Dec. 25, 2022.

In Yeoh's portrayals, exacting expectations — whether a devastatingly deployed "You will never be enough" or a clumsily blurted "You are getting fat" — are contextualized as springing forth from a deep, nearly inexpressible reservoir of love and concern for one's child. She does justice to real Asian mothers, portraying characters who serve as reparations for the racist, maligning damage that **Amy Chua**'s Tiger

Illustration by **Jasu Hu**

SUN: COURTESY OF SUBJECT. *RICH*: SANJA BUCKO/WARNER BROS. *ONCE*: ALLYSON RIGGS/A24.

Mom trope has implanted in the American imagination.

Last year, I seized the opportunity to pitch a feature long on my bucket list: a cover profile of Yeoh, one that would explore the woman behind the legend. She'd long been a fixture in Asian news media, but at the time I had read little of her personal life in Western articles. In particular, I was curious about her ability to channel, with such uncanny precision and authenticity, the complex and sometimes paradoxical qualities of our own real-life mothers. A quick web search confirmed that she has no biological or adoptive children of her own, and a deeper crawl through old clips surfaced references to that being a matter of fate not choice.

Another reason for my fixation with the motherhood angle is that I'd learned last January that I was pregnant. Although the pregnancy was welcome news for my husband and me, suddenly being faced with the impending reality of a new identity ushered new anxieties to the surface. "I don't know how to be a mom! I barely know how to take care of myself," I wailed one night, huddled next to my mother in her bed during a visit home one weekend. She spooned her tiny body around mine as she reassured me that, like all women, I would rise to the occasion when the time came.

The day before my interview with Yeoh, I had my first ultrasound appointment. A technician swept me with a probe as an image of my uterus — silent and still as a tomb — popped up on the monitor. "There's a lot of blood," she said, pointing to the cloudiness onscreen. My OB said I could take a week to decide whether to go the medical or surgical route (and this was February 2022, four months before I fully realized what a blessing it is to live in California, where such potentially life-saving options remain available). On our way out, I felt like apologizing to everyone in the clinic for my perceived failure.

I never made it back there with my decision. A few days later, my brother called at 2:30 in the morning: "Mom had an accident." She had spoken of increased dizziness over the past week, which we all chalked up to the strain of solo caregiving. Apparently she had gotten up in the middle of the night, lost her balance and struck her head hard on some furniture. Her second call was to 911. The first was to my brother, to tell him to come over and stay with my dad so that he wouldn't wake up in the morning frightened and alone.

My husband, **Mike**, and I arrived in Orange County at 4 a.m. My mother was already at the hospital, a few drops of blood in the doorway leaving a telltale trace of where she had been wheeled out by the paramedics. For the next week, Mike lived mostly in the kitchen, prepping, serving and cleaning up after my father's meals, while I was on nurse duty, getting him out of bed, showered, dressed and shuttled around the house. At night, I lay in my mother's bed soundlessly mouthing a desperate prayer to the heavens: "Not like this, God. Don't take her like this."

From left: Michelle Yeoh with Henry Golding in *Crazy Rich Asians*; and Stephanie Hsu, Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

During that time, I experienced occasional cramping that felt like my body attempting to turn itself inside out. One afternoon, I passed my embryo in the restroom. Mike and I stared silently into the bowl, wondering if the worst was over. I fished out the mass (we were afraid of clogging the toilet if we flushed it), wrapped it in a bag and left it on the floor of the garage, next to the recycling. When I went back later to check on laundry, Mike followed and we clung to each other and finally sobbed, our dashed hopes wadded up in bloody tissue on the concrete a few feet away. We stole fleeting seconds of private grief before domestic duties again called, and I wondered if this was what it was to be a parent: sublimating oneself in service of others, finding reserves of strength to do what needs to be done.

After my mother was discharged with six staples in her head, the challenge became restraining her from getting back to household chores right away. Mike returned to L.A. for work, and I attempted to multitask remotely, ostensibly reporting the Yeoh story from my parents' kitchen table but in reality spending my days managing health care and researching long-term caregiving options. (**Daniels**, *EEAAO*'s directors, graciously rescheduled after I ghosted them during our originally slated interview.)

Over the next couple of weeks, my feature story slowly came together, mostly at night as I typed away on the futon in my parents' study. Revisiting Yeoh's stunt-work-inflicted close call with permanent injury and death in the late '90s, I thought about my mother in the next room, determined to heal her body and live another day. But what was most revelatory for me was relating to Yeoh myself. For the first time, I saw her not just as a mother figure but as a woman who had to reconcile her own hopes with reality, who wanted to be a mother and fully pursued every means to that dream. In her I found comfort and solidarity, and alongside my friends' and other women's courageous disclosures of their fertility journeys, I could grieve my failed pregnancy without entertaining thoughts of shame.

"I love kids. I really wanted to have a family, but unfortunately that did not smile upon me," Yeoh told me during our interview. "It's tough when every month … this is the one thing I want. We were doing all those [fertility treatments]. As women, up to a certain age, you can do it. Then, you have to at some point accept reality."

I couldn't help but feel grateful yet apologetic that this particular universe, in denying Yeoh her personal desire, transformed her into a conduit of motherhood not only to those directly touched by her maternal nature — she is "Mama Michelle" or "Popo Michelle" to her goddaughter's child, friends, family and colleagues — but also to generations of strangers who have found comfort and resonance in her portrayals of motherhood. "She has a very familial energy," *EEAAO* co-writer/director **Daniel Kwan** told me. "She's very nurturing and can transplant herself in any situation and she's suddenly the auntie or the mom taking care of everyone."

It feels unfair to ask any woman, even an internationally famous movie star who has agreed to an on-the-record interview, to share such a specific and personal pain as infertility, so I briefly told Yeoh about my own experience, just to make the exchange feel more like a conversation between fellow humans.

"But you are still …?" asked Michelle Yeoh, ever the nurturer.

I nod. "We're still trying."

"That's good. I think you have to try until you can't."

And I did. Around Thanksgiving, both of my parents got COVID, so Mike and I again relocated to Orange County for a few weeks. It was a mirror bookend to the beginning of the year, with a few significant differences. This time, we were more practiced at working together as care providers — and I was accompanied by a new presence, one with a strong heartbeat and an equally strong kick. As Yeoh makes history with her Oscar nomination for *EEAAO*, I am now in my third trimester. I know firsthand that the future holds no guarantees. But if I've learned nothing else this past year from the strong women in my life — the sorority of infertility and pregnancy loss, our communal mother Michelle Yeoh, my own mom — it's that you keep trying while you can. And even if you reach the limits of time and your physical body, being a mother is so much more than a biological capacity. It's a posture — one of persevering, generous love.

# Young Hollywood House Flippers Rake It In

Following in the footsteps of Diane Keaton and Ellen DeGeneres, a new generation of savvy stars (Miley Cyrus, Ariana Grande, Vanessa Hudgens) are buying and reselling houses for big profits: 'If the owner is notable, people want to buy their properties' *By Hadley Meares*

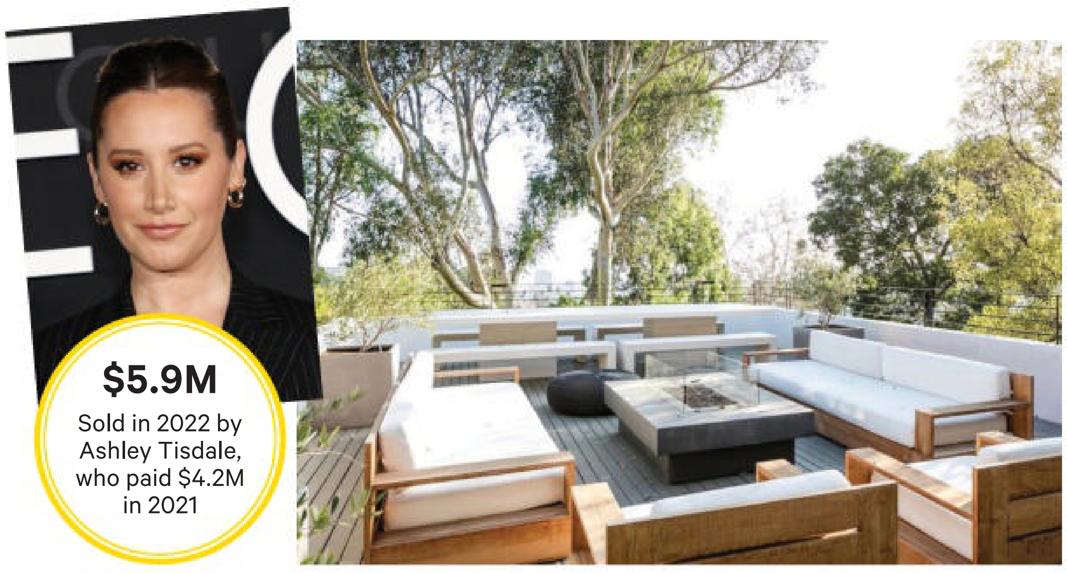
While **Ellen DeGeneres** is the undisputed grand dame of celebrity real estate portfolios, buying and flipping pedigree properties at an astounding rate, a new generation of celebrity house-hoppers are following her lead.

"Right now there's such a cool factor with being an entrepreneur, being good at business, being financially literate," says Douglas Elliman agent **Heather Roy**. "Being involved in real estate is perceived as all these things."

The favorable markets in Southern California mean sellers can often make a tidy profit remarkably quickly.

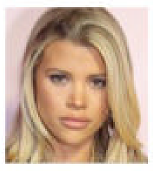
"From an investment standpoint, Los Angeles usually appreciates the quickest. If you buy correctly, you can gain equity or make a profit by holding a property for just a few years," says **Carl Gambino** of Compass. "Whereas, depending on what you purchase in New York City, it could take five-plus years to gain incredible value. You have to hold longer." (Though things could change if the L.A. market goes from its current sluggish state, brought on by high interest rates, into significant decline.)

In 2021, Gambino clients **Joe Jonas** and **Sophie Turner** flipped a house in Encino to DJ **Zedd** for $15.2 million less than two years after buying it for $14.1 million, and in September, **Naomi Osaka** sold a Beverly Hills house for $8.7 million; she paid $6.9 million three years earlier.

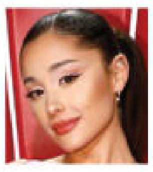


**$5.9M**
Sold in 2022 by Ashley Tisdale, who paid $4.2M in 2021

Other recent fast flippers include **Sofia Richie** and music exec **Elliot Grainge** (they bought a house in Beverly Hills for $17 million and sold it 10 months later for $21.8 million), **Ashley Tisdale** (she paid $4.2 million for a pad in the Hollywood Hills in 2021 and sold it less than two years later to singer **Madison Beer** for $5.9 million) and **Ariana Grande** (she sold a house in Montecito to K5 Global's **Michael Kives** for $9.1 million after paying $6.8 million for it two years earlier).



Richie



Grande

**Tomer Fridman** — the longtime real estate agent to the **Kardashian** family, who are also known for buying and selling houses at a clip — says many entertainment clients think about a potential sale early on in the buying process. "The business manager is with us on our tour, and we do talk about not just use and utility in terms of the client loving it, but 'Are we going to be able to sell this in one, two, three, four, five years? And are we going to have a return on investment once the designer's done and costs whatever it is?' " he says. "And the truth is, most of the time, it's yes, because the name of the owner is notable, and people want to buy their properties."

As **Emil Hartoonian** of The Agency notes, building a real estate portfolio is a smart investment for celebrities. "Whether they're actors, whether they're music celebrities or whatnot, they have windows [in their careers]," he says. "The business manager's job is really to create that wealth stream that protects the income that they've made and to make that work for them in future years when they're not making as much. One of the biggest vehicles for that has been real estate."

Roy also believes that folks in the entertainment industry find that real estate investment suits them. "Flipping is a production," she says. "These are people used to productions. They're used to there being an important financial component or an important time component. Lots of things going wrong, all that."

The creativity component is also key. "I do think, honestly, it's an artistic outlet," says Fridman, "and then, it just so happens that

Illustration by **Joren Joshua**

TISDALE HOME: REALTOR.COM. TISDALE: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES. RICHIE: DANA PLEASANT/GETTY IMAGES FOR BOOHOO.COM. GRANDE: TRAE PATTON/NBC/NBCU PHOTO BANK VIA GETTY IMAGES.

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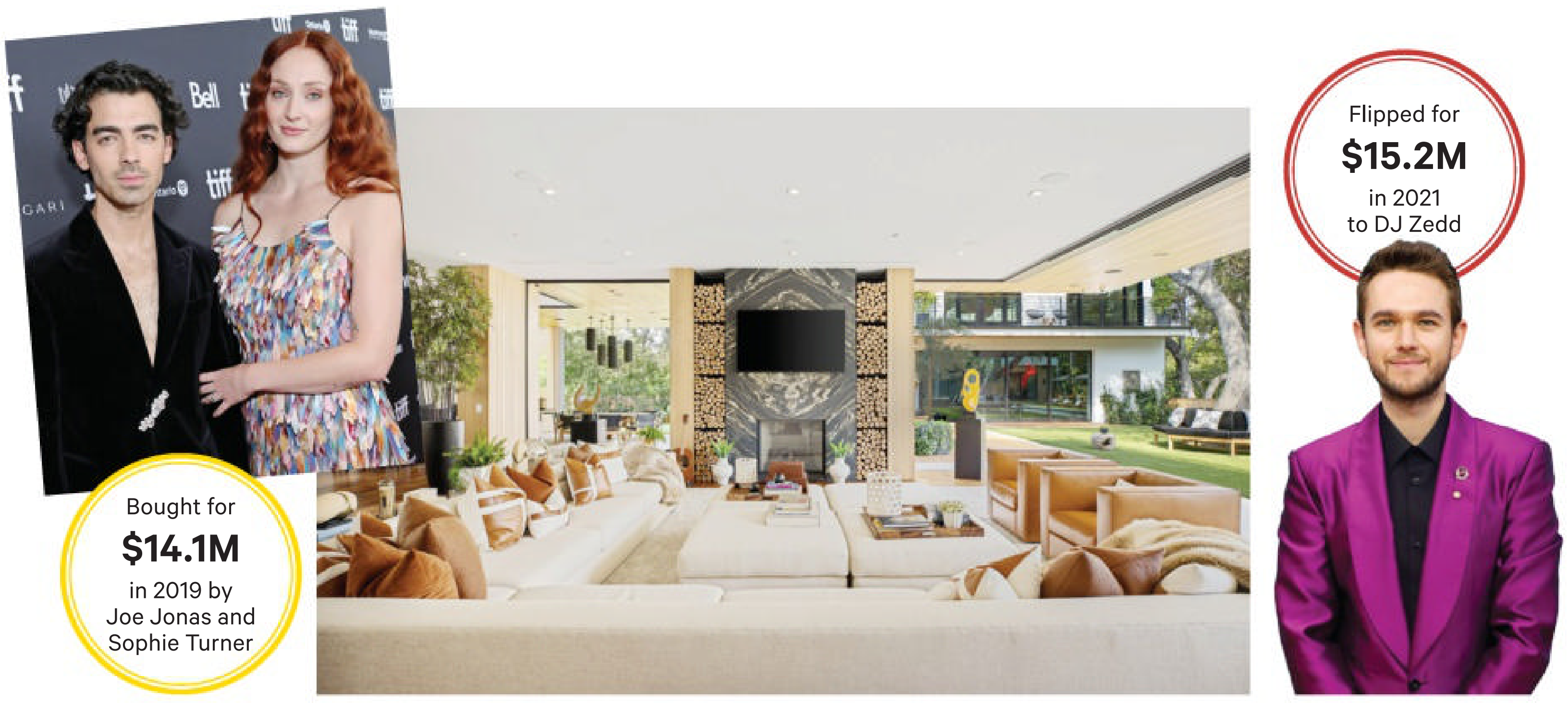

Bought for
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in 2019 by
Joe Jonas and
Sophie Turner

Flipped for
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to DJ Zedd

they also make a fortune when they sell them." In years gone by, adds Fridman, new buyers would hire a designer "and then you [the new homeowner] went on your way, and then you came home, and the house was done for you. When I was a kid, that's how it was done. Now, these people love the process. They love to be involved. I mean, I have clients that fly out with their designer to the Paris Flea Market and they pick the light fixtures because they want vintage. They love the process. They love it."

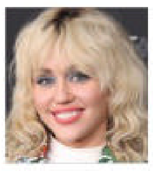
And, agents note that many stars have much easier access to coveted designers such as **Waldo Fernandez**, **Kelly Wearstler** and **Michael S. Smith**, whose touch is almost guaranteed to increase a home's resale value. "Once the designer puts in X amount of money, it exponentially increases the value of the homes," says Fridman.

Increased real estate coverage also has made high-end flipping a more lucrative operation. "[Look at] Dirt.com, those guys are like TMZ," **Stuart Vetterick** of Hilton & Hyland says of the celebrity real estate news site. (Dirt is owned by *THR* parent company PMC.) "They are able to sniff out and find out celebrity purchases and sales more than ever before."

This has made buying and selling homes for profit increasingly fashionable among younger members of the entertainment industry attempting to brand themselves. "Social media and the pervasiveness of media in general has been the lighter fluid on that. Because when we started, **Diane Keaton** had an amazing reputation. She would redo these houses, Spanish in particular, and they were gorgeous," says **Learka Bosnak**, Roy's partner at Douglas Elliman. "The top agents knew about [star flippers like Keaton]. And then the savvy buyers knew about it. But now if you have the equivalent of someone like that, it's all over the world."

Fridman also notes that shelter publications like *Architectural Digest* have increased their coverage of stars' homes. "The minute I see a celebrity on the cover of *Architectural Digest* [speaking] of what an extraordinary job they did with their home, it's getting listed within the month," he says. "It's so funny. It's literally the precursor to it getting listed."

Tisdale's house was featured by *Architectural Digest* six months before it sold, and **Miley Cyrus** and **Vanessa Hudgens** flipped houses after getting a spotlight in the publication as well. Cyrus sold a home in Hidden Hills that she had bought for $4.9 million in 2020 for $7.2 million in April 2021, and Hudgens flipped a house in Los Feliz that she had purchased for $4.9 million in December 2018 for $6.7 million in March 2022 after working with designer **Jake Arnold** on a redo.



Cyrus

Hudgens

Agents agree that publicity can up the price point and cachet of a property. "No matter if you're a billionaire, celebrity, singer, or businessperson, you always want to have that 'I purchased XYZ's house.' It offers some kind of pedigree to it," Fridman says. "It truly does."

Bosnak agrees. "What you are doing when you make a real estate decision is piling up all the pros and cons," she says. "And it's a big rock on the pro side because it's really hard to argue with 'a celebrity bought this, then I bought it and also kept it gorgeous.' Now why wouldn't you want to buy it?"

Perhaps surprisingly, the agents *THR* spoke with said most of their clients actually do live for a time in the homes they flip. But for most of them, moving is much less stressful than it is for the average Angeleno. "They're not the ones moving!" Hartoonian says. "If somebody were to pack all my stuff and organize it to a T and put it into a new place and organize it to the perfect way that I know where everything is, and I love the way it looks, then all I do is sleep in a new room."

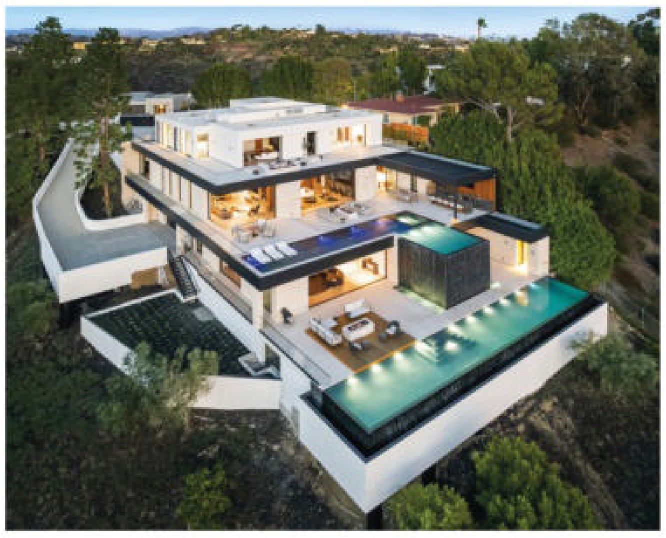
In fact, for top-tier flippers, the profits and the production are down to a science. "It is like a military operation," Fridman says. "You have assistants, business manager, staff. When you see it, it's like a beautifully orchestrated, chaotic ballet."

## *Ultra-Wealthy Scramble to Sell Before April 1 Mansion Tax*

Everyone loves a gimmick, even the über rich. The controversial Measure ULA — which was opposed (futilely) by top real estate agents — is set to go into effect April 1. Known as "the mansion tax," the L.A. City measure will require sellers of properties of more than $5 million to pay a 4 percent transfer tax, while sales of more than $10 million will pay a 5.5 percent tax. All funds raised will be used to fund sorely needed public housing.

Now, just under the gun, blue chip sellers are using the looming deadline to try to goose sales. The undeveloped 260-acre Senderos Canyon in Bel Air is being auctioned off by Paramount Realty USA. In an attempt to woo buyers quickly, owner Giro Properties has announced a $2 million discount if the deal is closed before April 1.

*Botched* star **Paul Nassif** has listed his Bel Air mansion at 1035 Stradella Road for $28 million with a similar twist. The plastic surgeon is offering a $1 million closing bonus to a buyer's agent who will close on the property before April 1. Nassif came up with the idea because "he would have to pay 5.5 percent more if he sells after April 1," says Coldwell Banker's **Jade Mills**, who holds the listing along with **Josh** and **Matt Altman**, **Mauricio Umansky** and **Tomer Fridman**.



Paul Nassif's Bel Air mansion is listed for $28 million.

Across the board, brokers have seen buyers scurrying to avoid the steep tax. Many people, says Mills, "are rushing to close escrow before April 1, so they can purchase the properties for 5.5 percent less." As for Nassif's listing, Mills says the bonus offer has brought massive online interest. "We have received more views in the past month for 1035 Stradella than I have ever seen on any of my other listings," Mills says. "There have been more than 35,000 views." — H.M.

ZEDD HOME: ANTHONY BARCELO. JONAS: MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES. ZEDD: MOMODU MANSARAY/GETTY IMAGES. NASSIF HOME: MARC ANGELES. CYRUS: AMY SUSSMAN/WIREIMAGE. HUDGENS: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES.

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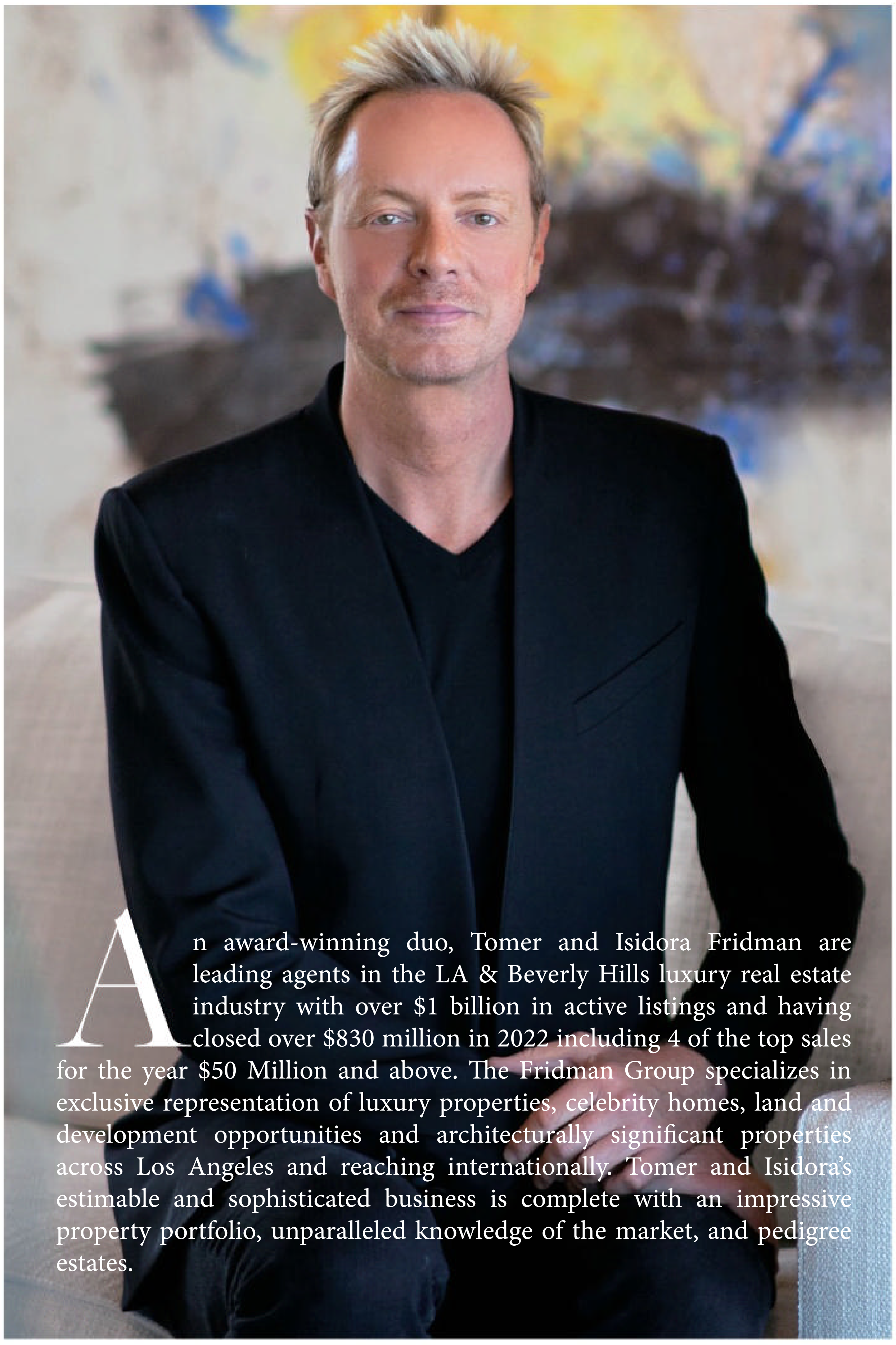

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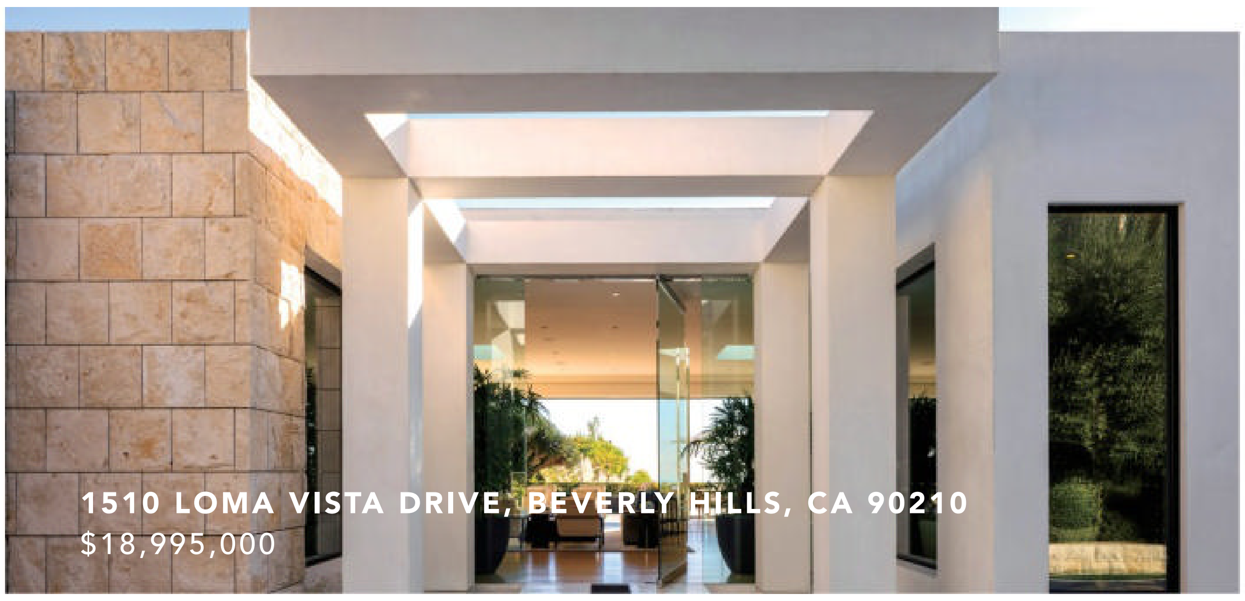

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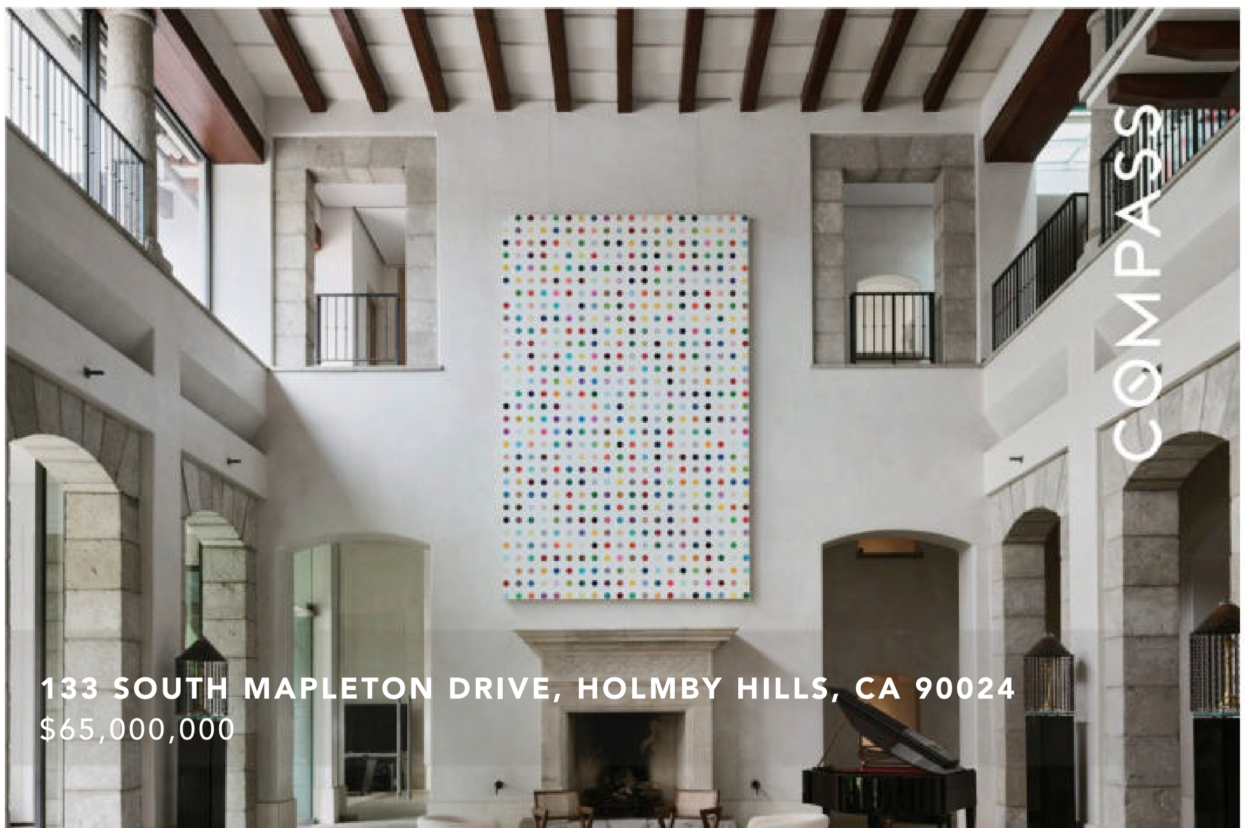

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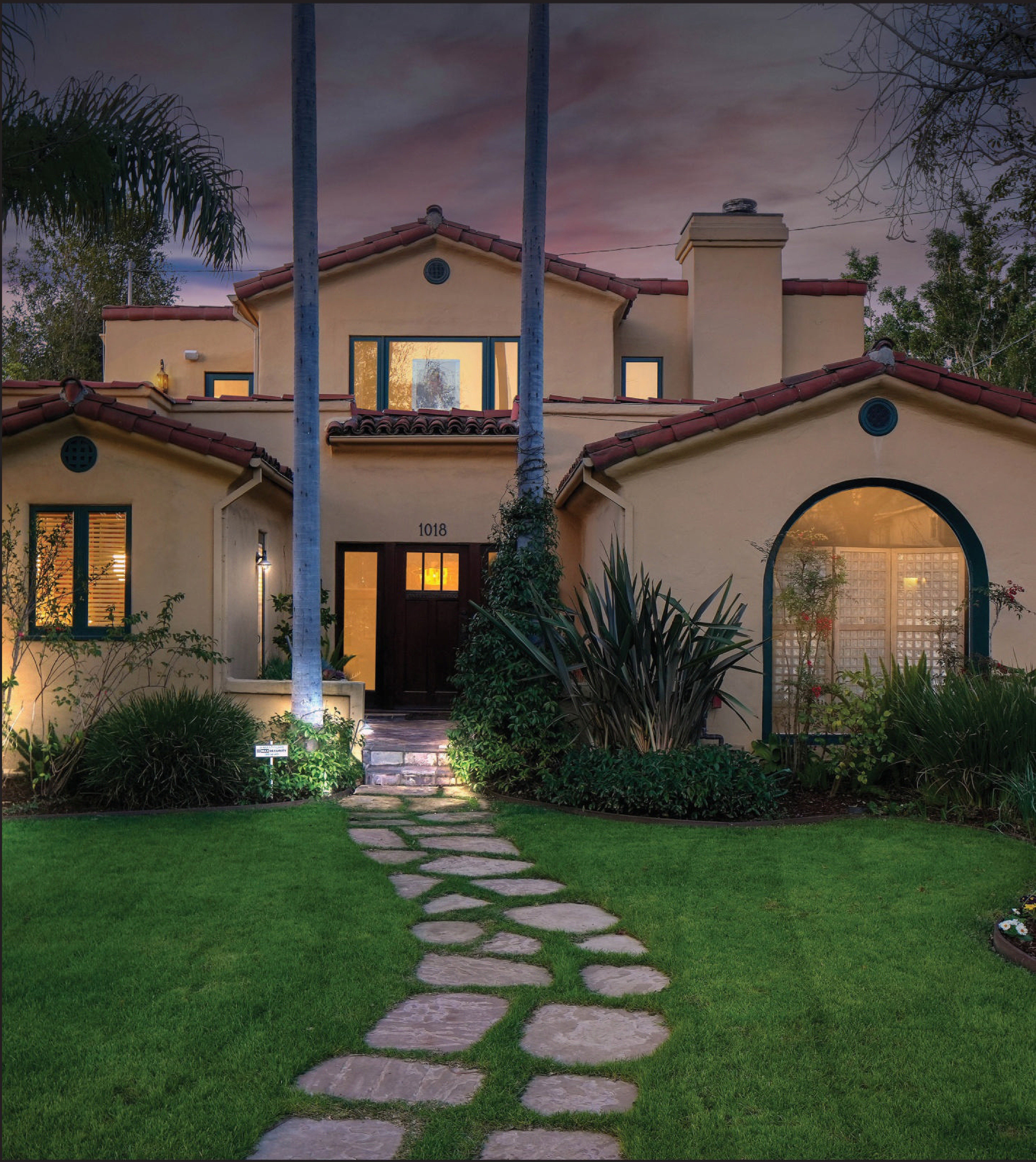

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# OSCARS 2023

*THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER*'S ANNUAL BIG ISSUE, CELEBRATING HOLLYWOOD'S BIGGEST NIGHT, ANSWERS YOUR SMARTEST AND SILLIEST QUESTIONS: WHAT WOULD JIMMY KIMMEL DO IF SLAPPED? CAN AWARDS-CIRCUIT FRIENDSHIPS LAST? WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU BAIL ON CAMPAIGNING? (ASK MO'NIQUE, WHO MAKES UP WITH LEE DANIELS ON PAGE 74.) HOW HARD ARE THE ACADEMY'S INCLUSION STANDARDS? WHAT KIND OF SHOW DOES IT TAKE TO BREAK TV-RATINGS RECORDS? (SEE OUR *TITANIC* OSCAR ORAL HISTORY, PAGE 82.) AND, OF COURSE, WHO WILL WIN? TURN THE PAGE …

ILLUSTRATION BY SEBASTIAN CURI

# ‘Alert the Affiliates: We’re Going Long’

The Oscar host on the ‘preposterous’ expectations around ratings and run time, whether he’ll joke at attendee Tom Cruise’s expense and what’s on tap if The Slap happens on his watch: ‘If I’m bigger than they are, I beat the shit out of them on television’

BY LACEY ROSE

**“Third time’s the most** charming,” read the latest barrage of promos for Jimmy Kimmel’s turn as host of the 95th Oscars, set to unspool from the Dolby Theatre on March 12. Having emceed in 2017 and 2019, Kimmel’s selection is seen as a homecoming, to say nothing of a safe choice at a fraught time for both the Academy of Motion Pictures and award shows at large. “It’s so important to have a host who knows how to handle live television and a live audience,” Academy CEO Bill Kramer noted recently, adding of Kimmel’s appeal: “He’s funny, he’s respectful, his edges aren’t too sharp.” In late February, Kimmel took a break from his day job, as longtime host of ABC’s *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, to discuss the delicate balance of being both funny and safe, the unrealistic expectations around ratings and run time and what, exactly, he’d do should someone storm the stage and slap him, as Will Smith infamously did to Chris Rock at last year’s ceremony.

**Hosting the Oscars is easily one of the most thankless jobs in Hollywood, and it’s only gotten more so in recent years. So, honestly, why do this again?**

I think it’s probably that I was surprised because I didn’t necessarily think I’d ever do it again or be asked to do it again. And it wasn’t one of those situations where they couldn’t get anybody and they asked me at the last minute — I definitely would have said no if that was the case. So, I don’t know, it kind of came out of the blue and they clearly got me at the right moment. I did wait a week to tell my wife. I thought she might react negatively, but she was very positive, so I said, “OK, yeah, I’ll do it.”

**When you were about to host the first pandemic Emmys, you told me how much you had loved the extended time you’d just taken off and how it made you reassess the idea of retirement. Now, here we are, a few years later, and you’ve re-upped at *Jimmy Kimmel***

KIMMEL: ABC/MATT SAYLES. BEATTY: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES.

***Live!* and you're hosting the Oscars again. What happened?**
Yeah. (*Laughs.*) That's just me. I go from a hot to cold very quickly. I'm sure on Sunday at midnight of the Oscars, I'll be contemplating retirement again. But if you catch me at the right moment, you can get me to sign almost anything.

**Bill Kramer recently discussed your appeal to the Academy, noting that your "edges aren't too sharp" and "people in the audience feel very safe." How do you balance the need to make that audience in the Dolby feel safe with the need to make the audience at home feel engaged?**
Well, first of all, when Bill said my edges aren't too sharp, I think what he was saying is I'm fat. I take that as fat shaming. And I've told him I'm trying to lose weight. I did not fit into the tuxedo I wore in 2018, and it was disturbing. But I know what he means. I'm in a unique position in that my job is to make fun of people in Hollywood and then to have them sit next to me on the stage. And I've had 20 years of practice as far as balancing that stuff out goes. When I first started doing [*Jimmy Kimmel Live!*], I had no practice and there was no balance. I would just mow through the guests and then we wouldn't have another A-list guest for another eight months. (*Laughs.*)

**You've improved considerably since then.**
I'm also very conscious of what this is, that the Oscars is something that is very meaningful to people in the movie industry, and for many of them, this will be the biggest professional night of their lives. The last thing I want to do is ruin it for anyone.

**Bill also revealed that there was now a "crisis committee in place," noting that they've "run many scenarios." What has that entailed?**
I wish I knew. I've not been involved in that. I guess I'm the last thing they're worried about. (*Laughs.*)

**As the host, that feels like something you should be involved in, no?**
Yeah, I feel like I should at least know what was discussed so I know what I should fear when I walk onstage. But, really, I suspect it mostly has to do with UFOs.

**I am genuinely curious: If there's another slap, what do you do?**
You mean, if somebody comes up on the stage and slaps me? Well, I size them up, and, if I'm bigger than they are, I beat the shit out of them on television. And if it's the Rock, I run.

> "If you're gonna be part of a fuckup, it might as well be the biggest fuckup ever."

**Up until The Slap, you were part of the biggest Oscar night saga in recent memory, having hosted the year that *La La Land* was named best picture, only to have that title rescinded when it became apparent *Moonlight* had actually won.**
Yeah, we got knocked down the list. It's disappointing in a lot of ways. If you're gonna be part of a fuckup, it might as well be the biggest fuckup ever. Being part of the second-biggest fuckup doesn't carry as much cachet.

**Industry monologues are your strong suit, as we've seen for years at the Disney upfront. Can we expect a traditional monologue?**
It'll be similar to what I've done in the past. I don't have a lot of talents, so there's not a huge number of areas for me to draw from outside of telling jokes. I mean, I am pretty good at drawing cartoons, so I guess I could sit down and do caricatures of the stars? (*Laughs.*) But I particularly enjoy writing jokes for a specific audience, whether that be at the upfronts or a bunch of TV or movie stars. It enables you to be very specific.

**When you're crafting those jokes, is the audience, in your mind, the stars in the theater or the average Joes watching at home?**
The best advice I got about hosting the Oscars was from Billy Crystal, who told me, "Play to the room." You always have to be conscious of the audience at home and make sure they understand what's going on, but you also want to get laughs in the room — and if you don't get that, it's not going to play well for people watching on TV. So that is my focus: not just the actors but all the various production people and show business luminaries who are sitting there listening to your jokes. And unlike most joke situations, they are on camera, so they're very careful about how they react, and that makes it a harder bar to clear.

**Is The Slap almost boring to joke about at this point?**
Well, whatever I say about it, it's going to have to be great, right? Because so much has been said and there's so much focus on it. I obviously don't want to make the whole monologue about that, but it would be ridiculous not to mention it.

**Tom Cruise was the butt of jokes at both the Golden Globes and DGA awards. He'll presumably be at the Oscars ...**
Yeah, he'll be at the Oscars.

**Will you go there in the way that the other show hosts have?**
No, I mean, listen, the reason that Tom Cruise is being embraced by the movie industry is that, I don't know if he saved [movies], but he definitely gave them the Heimlich maneuver.

**Steven Spielberg claims he saved the movie industry, and if Spielberg says it ...**
That movie [*Top Gun: Maverick*] made a lot of people who may not have been comfortable going to a movie theater, go to the movie theater. And I think that everyone in the movie business should be grateful, including *Avatar*, which might not have made nearly as much money had that ground not been broken by *Top Gun*.

**It didn't stop Globes host Jerrod Carmichael from making a Scientology joke. Speaking of Jerrod, during his monologue, he noted that he was being paid $500,000 to host the Globes. Did you immediately negotiate yourself a raise? [Kimmel has said he was paid $15,000 to host the Oscars in the past.]**
No. You know, I think that they have to pay a lot to get people to host that show. (*Laughs.*) I mean, that was a tricky situation that Jerrod wandered into, and I don't blame him for making them pay. They should pay him.

**In an Oscars promo, you joked about the run time of this year's show. How realistic is a three-hour show?**
Oh, it's preposterous! This show's going to be a lot longer than three

Envelopegate, the "second-biggest fuckup" in Oscar history, occurred in 2017 with Jimmy Kimmel (right) as host.

hours, I'll tell you that right now. Alert the affiliates, we're going long! (*Laughs.*) I mean, we've added all the categories back, so just by virtue of that, it's going to be long, but hopefully it'll be fun, too. I think we have some great performance moments.

**You've got Rihanna performing.**
We've got Rihanna. I think it's going to be a fun show, but, yes, everybody's always going to complain that it's long. I mean, you don't have to watch the whole thing, nobody's holding a gun to your head. Watch the first 15 minutes and then you can go to sleep, as far as I'm concerned.

**What's a more realistic show length, which you will at least try to hit?**
Oh, I want to run the show right up to *Good Morning America*. I want George Stephanopoulos to have to wait eight minutes to come out of his dressing room.

**Much will be made about the ratings of the show. What are the expectations going in?**
I don't know, it's not something that I have any control over. We're excited that there are movies [nominated that] people have seen, so we're hoping more people watch, but who the hell knows? There's a lot of focus put on the ratings of these award shows and it's used as a gauge in some ways, but it has almost nothing to do with the award shows themselves and everything to do with television viewing habits in general.

**So, what is your gauge for success?**
I'm a very harsh critic of my work, so if I feel even pretty good about it afterwards, I'll be happy. Honestly, the worst thing is if you and your writers do all this work and it's not worth it. Luckily, I haven't experienced that in a long time. And I feel like, barring a teleprompter outage or some unexpected flub on my part, maybe I eat too much soy sauce for lunch and I can't speak, I think we'll be in pretty good shape.

**Bill Kramer also said he hopes that this is "the beginning of a lovely, long new relationship with him." Have you signed on to host next year's show too?**
No. I don't even know what that means. My only guess is when he says, "a lovely, long relationship," he means the show — the show isn't going to be over until midnight. (*Laughs.*)

**My final question for you: Can you name the last five best picture winners?**
Oh, wow. OK. Do I have to name them in order? *CODA* was last year. *The Shape of Water* was one of them.

**Look at you.**
Obviously, *Moonlight* was one of them.

**That was actually six years ago, but I'll give it to you.**
That just means I can name the last six. I'm showing off. (*Laughs.*)

**That's true. It was a nice flex. Keep going.**
*Green Book* was one of them. Now, what am I missing? ... The original *Sonic the Hedgehog* was one of them.

**Definitely! (*Laughs.*)**
Oh, and *We Bought a Zoo*. That's right, right? I got it?

**You nailed it. Anything else I haven't asked?**
You didn't ask what I was wearing.

**What are you wearing?**
Well, right now I'm wearing a flannel shirt, um, some kind of stylish, I dare say cute, little high-top sneakers and a pair of black jeans.

**You're Oscar ready.**
I am. (*Laughs.*)

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*

# A DECADE OF OSCAR BFFS

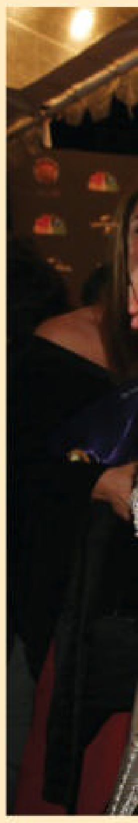
The long slog of campaigning during awards season can lead to surprising party pals and lasting friendships

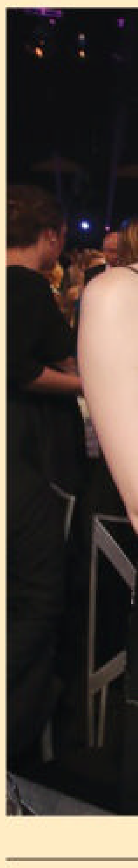
**BY KIRSTEN CHUBA**

2012

*Jean Dujardin and George Clooney*

The two best actor nominees — Clooney for *The Descendants* and Dujardin (who went on to win) for *The Artist* — became fast friends on the awards circuit, which included cozying up at the 2012 Oscar Nominees Luncheon. They would go on to work together on 2014's *The Monuments Men*, and Clooney enlisted Dujardin for a 2022 Nespresso ad that continued the friendly rivalry they had established during the Oscar race. An honorary mention for a Clooney awards-partner-in-crime goes to Brad Pitt, a longtime BFF, also nominated for best actor that year for *Moneyball*.





2019

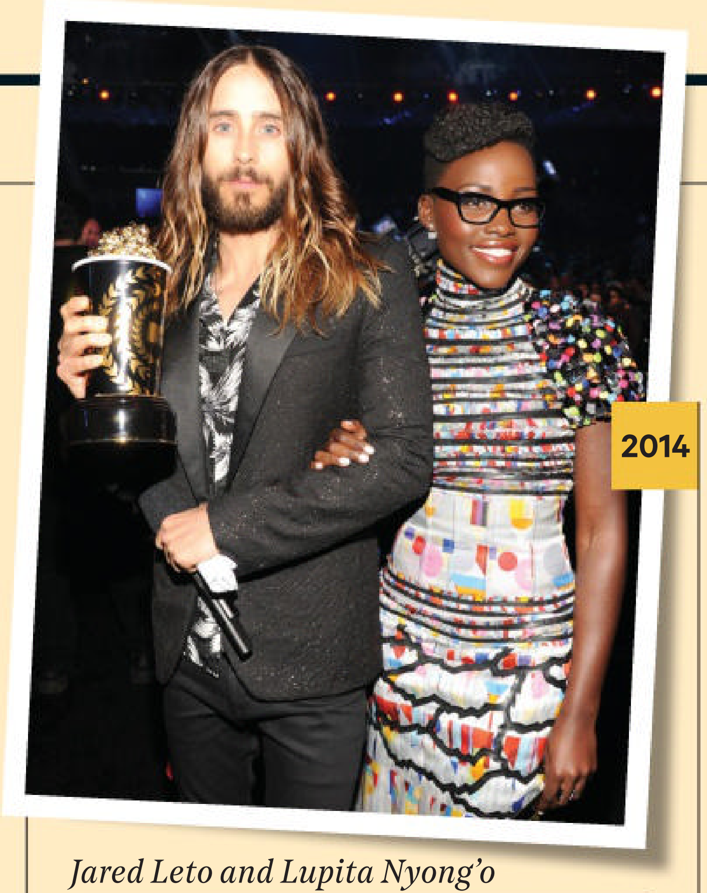
*Melissa McCarthy and Glenn Close*
*+ Rami Malek and Bradley Cooper*

No competition between these pairings, both nominated in the same categories at 2019's show: McCarthy (*Can You Ever Forgive Me?*) and Close (*The Wife*) formed a fun friendship in the best actress race, which included Close's viral reaction to seeing McCarthy on the Oscars red carpet; Bradley Cooper (*A Star Is Born*) and Rami Malek (who won for *Bohemian Rhapsody*) also became pals while up against each other in the best actor category. After Malek's win, Cooper called him "an incredible actor" in an interview with *Entertainment Tonight*.

CLOONEY: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES. HATHAWAY, MALEK: CHRISTOPHER POLK/NBC/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES. LETO, DORNAN: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE. WINSLET: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR TURNER. STONE: CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR TNT. STREEP, KALUUYA: KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/GETTY IMAGES. GERWIG: CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE CRITICS' CHOICE AWARDS. MCCARTHY: ERIC MCCANDLESS VIA GETTY IMAGES. WAITITI: ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. FRASER: MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES FOR CRITICS CHOICE ASSOCIATION.

### *Anne Hathaway and Jessica Chastain*

Both stars picked up Golden Globe wins to kick off the 2013 season, culminating in a best actress Oscar nomination for Chastain for *Zero Dark Thirty* and a best supporting actress nod (and win) for Hathaway for *Les Misérables*. The two became close confidants and repeat co-stars — a year later appearing together in *Interstellar*, and they recently wrapped the psychological thriller *Mothers' Instinct*, in which the co-stars are also co-producers. Hathaway called Chastain "my dear friend, work-wife and all-around wonder" on Instagram when commending the star's performance in *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, which also garnered Chastain the Oscar statuette for best actress in 2022.



### *Jared Leto and Lupita Nyong'o*

Before both would go on to win Oscars, Leto for *Dallas Buyers Club* and Nyong'o for *12 Years a Slave*, the duo developed a close relationship, with Leto even calling Nyong'o "my future ex-wife" in his 2014 Indie Spirits Awards speech. She told Net-a-Porter in 2019 that Leto was still on speed dial "because we were on that [Oscar campaign] journey together and he's so embracing of me. There was an intimacy that grew from that, that goes beyond the dating rumors, beyond all that." They never did publicly date but have been spotted catching up at events since.

### *Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet*

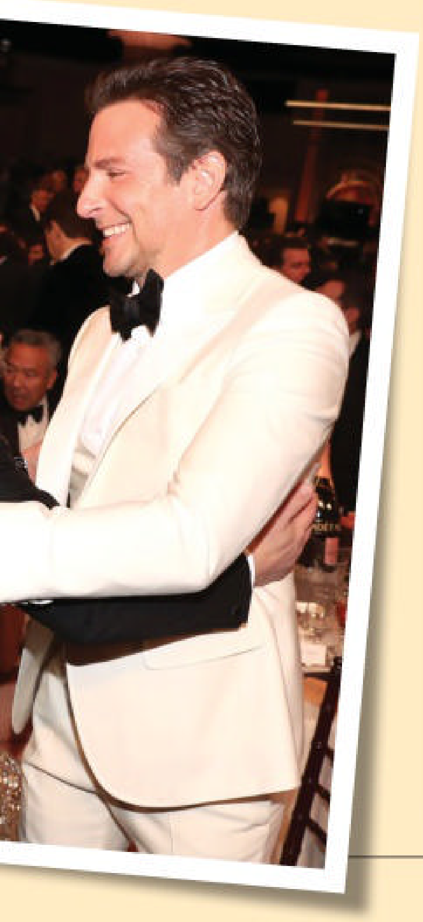
One of the movies' most famous duos came back together, offscreen, in 2016 when Winslet was recognized for her role in *Steve Jobs* and DiCaprio was on the journey to win his first Oscar for *The Revenant*. The two posed together throughout the awards run, and Winslet told the BBC at the time, "I feel very strongly that it may possibly be Leo's year. He is my closest friend in the world and I just couldn't imagine not being there to support him." And support him she did, as Winslet was among the first to embrace DiCaprio after his acceptance speech.

### *Emma Stone and Brie Larson + Meryl Streep and Viola Davis*

Though Larson was the Oscars' best actress winner in 2016 and Stone took the title in 2017, the two kept close throughout Stone's *La La Land* celebrations, as Larson often served as presenter and celebrated Stone's Oscar win with her backstage. Also that year, former *Doubt* co-stars Meryl Streep (up for *Florence Foster Jenkins*) and Viola Davis (up for *Fences*, which she would win the Oscar for) reconnected at awards events, including the Golden Globes, where Davis presented the Cecil B. DeMille Award to Streep, saying the star makes her "proud to be an artist."

### *Daniel Kaluuya and Timothée Chalamet + Greta Gerwig, Margot Robbie and Saoirse Ronan*

Chalamet and Kaluuya found common ground as 2018's two breakout stars — for their respective performances in *Call Me by Your Name* and *Get Out* — as they teamed up for the same BAFTA and Santa Barbara Film Festival events before walking the Oscars red carpet together. And years before their *Barbie* collaboration, Robbie (nominated for *I, Tonya*) kept close to *Lady Bird* director Gerwig and star (and fellow best actress nominee) Ronan throughout the awards circuit. Robbie and Ronan appeared together onscreen that same year in *Mary Queen of Scots*.



### *Taika Waititi and Bong Joon Ho*

The *Parasite* filmmaker and *Jojo Rabbit* writer, director and star — both of whom went home with statuettes on Oscar night — paired up for the 2020 season, with Waititi telling *THR* on that year's Oscars red carpet that of all the big awards moments he experienced during his film's run, "my favorite interactions have been with director Bong. We just always see each other at the same things." He also teased that when sharing a plane to travel between shows, Bong gets "debaucherous": "You should see him when he gets to altitude."

### *Jamie Dornan and Andrew Garfield*

The two U.K. stars started their careers together in Los Angeles around 2008, and both found themselves on the awards trail in 2022 with Garfield's Oscar-nominated performance as Jonathan Larson in *Tick, Tick, Boom!* and Dornan's starring role in best picture contender *Belfast* — leading to plenty of red carpet kisses.

### *Brendan Fraser and Ke Huy Quan*

The co-stars of 1992's *Encino Man* reunited on *THR*'s Actors Roundtable (with Fraser tearfully acknowledging to Quan, "We're still here") and since have become each other's biggest cheerleaders as Fraser picked up a nomination for *The Whale* and Quan for *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Quan told reporters backstage at the Critics Choice Awards that Fraser "gave me a big hug and put his arm on my shoulder" after catching up for the first time in 30 years amid awards season.

# ‘There Were So Many Black Directors Before Me’

In 2010, Roger Ross Williams became the first African American helmer to win an Oscar. It took years for Hollywood to come calling, but now, ‘This is the busiest my career has been’ BY MIA GALUPPO

Photographed by **Jai Lennard**

**It’s two months into 2023, and Roger Ross** Williams has just landed in his home state of New York from the Berlin Film Festival, where he debuted his latest documentary, about music superstar Donna Summer. Before that, he had alighted in Los Angeles at the Academy Museum, where he posed on the red carpet with Oprah Winfrey at the premiere of Hulu’s *The 1619 Project*, after the Sundance Film Festival screening of his narrative directorial debut, *Cassandro*. The Park City stop took place at the back end of a trip to Pasadena for the TCAs, where he presented projects from his prolific One Story Up production banner.

“This is the busiest my career has been,” says Williams. It was only a decade earlier that the filmmaker had an Oscar to his name but was sleeping on a friend’s couch, unable to raise money for his first feature documentary, *God Loves Uganda*. His win for documentary short for *Music by Prudence* was historic — Williams became the first Black director to be awarded an Oscar — and was the talk of the morning show circuit after the film’s producer barnstormed the mic and interrupted his speech (more on that later). Still, his phone wasn’t ringing.

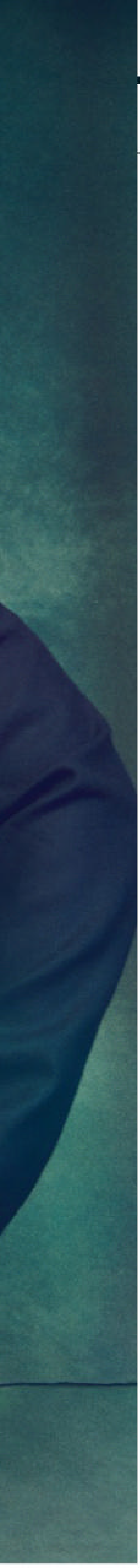
“The people who are making the decisions — the agents, the studio heads — they don’t look like me. They couldn’t identify and connect with someone who looked like me. They just didn’t think of me. So they didn’t call me,” he says of his 2010 win. “I made them see who I am and never let up.”

**Williams grew up in Easton, Pennsylvania,** raised by a single mother who worked as a maid. After graduating from New York University, Williams spent much of his early career directing and producing segments for Michael Moore’s *TV Nation* as well as PBS, NBC, CNN and ABC. “What I identify with is people who society has left behind,” says Williams. Documentary subjects have included an autistic man who interprets his world through the prism of classic Disney animation (*Life, Animated*), the American evangelical movement in Uganda and its effects on the country’s LGBTQ community (*God Loves Uganda*) and a disabled Zimbabwean singer who fronts a group of fellow African musicians as seen in *Music by Prudence*.

Accepting his Oscar for *Prudence*, Williams ascended the stage at the Dolby Theatre and was about 10 seconds into his speech when producer Elinor Burkett edged her way to the microphone and started talking. At that point, Williams and Burkett had not spoken for some time, with Burkett having had creative differences with Williams and distributor HBO. Those differences resulted in a lawsuit that was settled out of court, leaving Burkett with a producer credit on the film, but severing all other ties. At the ceremony, the Academy had asked that only one person from each filmmaking team speak, with others allowed to stand onstage. Williams was tapped to accept, which did not sit well with Burkett. Both director and producer spoke to multiple outlets after the event. “We should have been able to flip a coin on who would speak,” Burkett said on the *The Joy Behar Show*. Williams was invited to finish his speech on *Larry King Live*.

It’s hard to make out anything said by Burkett during the Oscar telecast, but, minus any business context, the optics were that a white woman interrupted the acceptance speech of the first African American director

BURKETT: MICHAEL CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE. *CASSANDRO*: COURTESY OF SUNDANCE.



Roger Ross Williams was photographed Feb. 24 at his One Story Up Productions office in Brooklyn, New York.

to win an Oscar. More than 10 years on, Williams often refers to the moment as a "blessing," pointing out that the doc short has never been a must-watch category for viewers, and the uncomfortable incident garnered more attention for the film and filmmaker than an Oscar win alone would have. Still, he says he doesn't want to be remembered as the guy who was Kanye'd at the Oscars a year after Kanye West interrupted Taylor Swift's acceptance speech at the 2009 MTV VMAs: "The moment has probably influenced a lot of what happened to me after. I felt I had something to prove." As to his trailblazing status, Williams adds: "It's a shame that I was the first African American director to win an Oscar when there are so many incredible African American directors before me who should have won an Oscar — John Singleton, Spike Lee — what does that say about Hollywood and the Academy that it didn't happen until I won for *Music by Prudence*?"

In 2016, Williams was voted into the Academy's Board of Governors, representing the documentary branch. He walked into his first governors meeting, and "sitting there was Steven Spielberg, the governor of the directing branch, Tom Hanks, governor at the time of acting branch — a lot of powerful white men. I was one of the few Black faces in that room. I'd be lying if I didn't say that I was completely intimidated." He adds, "I'm not sure anyone in that room even saw me, but I had a seat at the table." Williams would chair the subcommittee in charge of the Academy's A2020 effort (established after the 2015 season, when all 20 of the acting nominations went to white actors), which was meant to double the number of women and people of color in the voting body. Critics pointed out that the effort would be noteworthy only if the Academy released membership metrics to let people know what, exactly, it was doubling. "The wider Academy is the wider Academy, but in the doc branch I had the opportunity to change things," says Williams, who notes that during his time as governor, from 2016 to 2022, the doc branch achieved gender parity and upped its international membership to 30 percent.

Williams' second Oscar nom came with the 2016 feature doc *Life, Animated,* and it was at this point that the industry as a whole started to take notice. The timing coincided with what would become an exponential boom in doc filmmaking, spurred by content-hungry streaming services in the late 2010s. After decades of chasing grant money or the limited private financing available to nonfiction filmmakers, Williams and documentarians finally had access to the studio funding that narrative filmmakers had long enjoyed. Before, "I was working for hire," explains Williams. "I was leaving a lot of money and resources on the table because the production fees [were] going to other production companies."

The couch Williams was sleeping on after his Oscar win belonged to Geoff Martz, an Emmy-winning news producer at ABC who produced *Nightline*, among other programs. "It just seemed wrong. It really did," says Martz of Williams' inability to land a project after his Oscar win. "Looking back now, that is why he wants to pay it forward. He wants to make it easier for people to get their start."

Williams and Martz formed One Story Up in 2018, with the mission of producing nonfiction projects from BIPOC filmmakers throughout their careers. After launching, the company started slow, producing shorts and several episodes of Netflix's *The Innocence Files*, a nonfiction series that explored cases of wrongful conviction, while developing works for the screen like *Between the World and Me*, an adaptation of Ta-Nehisi Coates' book that was written as a letter to his teenage son about the American Black experience. After the 2020 murder of George Floyd, when studios began commissioning more projects from Black filmmakers, companies including Netflix, HBO and Hulu began flocking to Williams for guidance and content. Two years after launching the banner, Williams found himself on a Zoom call with Winfrey and Disney CEO Bob Iger, pitching the adaptation of *The 1619 Project*. ("When Oprah pitches, it's to the heads of the company," he says.) One Story Up now has 80 employees, and among its credits are the Netflix series *High on the Hog* and the Ben Crump doc *Civil*.

Recently, Williams has branched out into the world of narrative with Amazon's *Cassandro*, based on his 2015 short doc about Saúl Armendáriz, a luchador who performs in drag under the name Cassandro. The project was chosen for Sundance's Directors Lab, which counts the Coen brothers and Barry Jenkins as alums and pairs first-time feature directors with mentors to produce five scenes from their would-be films. Sundance Institute founder Robert Redford mentored Williams.

"The thing that I've feared the most was working with actors, but the first thing [Redford] said to me was, 'Lean into your documentary skills,' " recalls Williams. "It's harder with a documentary because you're working with a real person. You're trying to get them to a place where they reveal themselves. He said, 'That's exactly what you're trying to do with an actor.' " Redford also helped storyboard the film's sex scene, his illustrations of the shots now framed and hanging in Williams' One Story Up office. *THR*'s Sundance review of *Cassandro*, which will be released later this year on Amazon, notes that "Williams' documentary background breathes grit and authenticity into the environment."

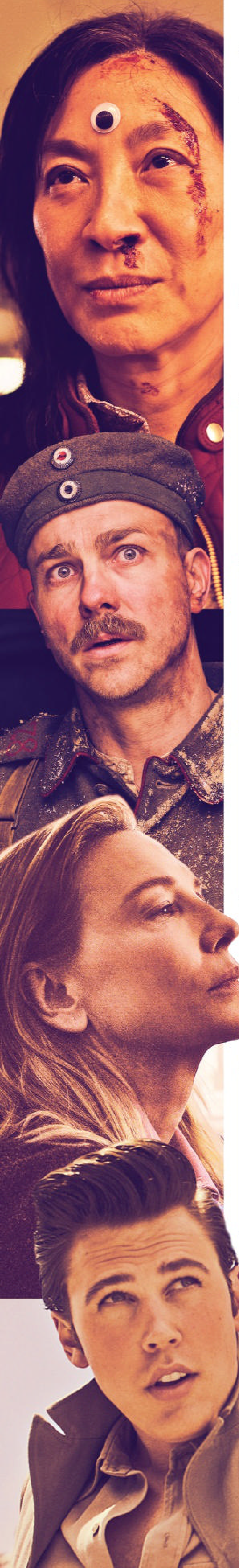
A couple of years ago, Williams received an honorary doctorate at Pennsylvania's Lafayette College — a homecoming of sorts. "My mother used to be a maid there, at one of the frat houses. Imagine being a maid at a frat house," says Williams, who would help her clean after the patrician residents' nights of hard partying. His mother was in the audience the day he accepted the honor, just as she was in the audience when he accepted his Oscar.

Far left: When Williams' *Music by Prudence* won best documentary short at the 2010 Oscars, estranged producer Elinor Burkett interrupted his speech. Left: Gael García Bernal in Williams' Amazon feature *Cassandro.*

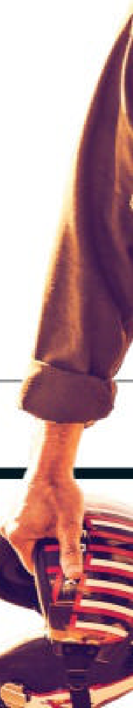
**After this interview, Williams is headed** upstate to the home in the Catskills that he shares with his husband, Casper de Boer. The property includes a nearly two-century-old barn and a pine grove, all of which doubles as a wedding venue — Roxbury Barn & Estate — run by de Boer. When Williams isn't on set or at pitch meetings, he spends his time at home gardening or building stone walls: "That's how I meditate. It's like a giant puzzle." Soon, though, he'll be leaving again for Texas to screen *Love to Love You, Donna Summer* at SXSW, which is where he'll be watching this year's Oscars ceremony. "I hope that more people like me get a chance to be up on that stage. The Academy has a ways to go, we all know that. But I want to keep fighting for the Rogers of the world to get up on that stage." He pauses, and then adds, "And actually be able to complete their speech." THR

# WHO WILL WIN VS. WHO *SHOULD* WIN

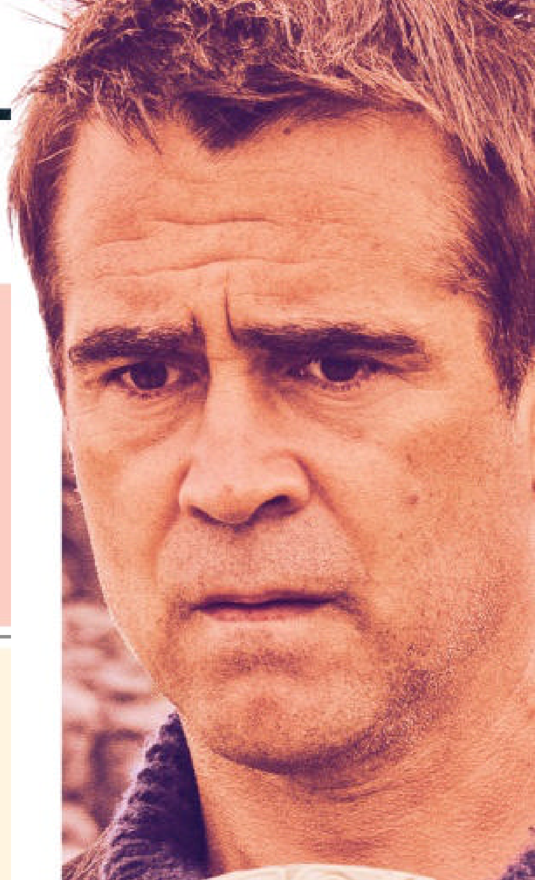
*THR*'s awards expert and chief film critic on who will take home Oscar gold — and who is most deserving



| **WHO WILL WIN**<br>By Scott Feinberg | | **WHO SHOULD WIN**<br>By David Rooney |
|---|---|---|
| The Academy's preferential ballot wouldn't seem to favor A24's polarizing *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, but the film swept the guilds' top honors, including the Producers Guild's, which is decided on a preferential ballot. But BAFTA's top prize went to Netflix's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, indicating strong European support. It's the nominee with the best shot of pulling off a shocker.<br>**WILL WIN *Everything Everywhere All at Once*** | **PICTURE** | My heart beats strongest for this two-man civil war tragicomedy, which shows a new maturity and depth of feeling from Martin McDonagh. It assembles a peerless ensemble, each of them etching finely drawn character portraits, not to mention scene-stealer Jenny, the miniature donkey. Todd Field's caustic reflection on abuse of power, *Tár*, would be another deserving winner.<br>**SHOULD WIN *The Banshees of Inisherin*** |
| There are constituencies for critics' darlings Todd Field (*Tár*), Martin McDonagh (*The Banshees of Inisherin*) and Globe winner Steven Spielberg (*The Fabelmans*). But *Everything Everywhere All at Once*'s Daniels (Kwan and Scheinert) won the DGA's top prize, which has predicted this Oscar all but eight times in the past 74 years.<br>**WILL WIN Daniels, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*** | **DIRECTOR** | It's tough to narrow down: Field's forensic craftsmanship, taking risks at every turn with a magnificently brittle protagonist whose outrageous hubris draws us in rather than distances us? McDonagh's unerring grasp of tone and virtuoso command of language? Or Daniels' wizardry with a narrative that continually multiplies? Field is the field leader, by a whisker.<br>**SHOULD WIN Todd Field, *Tár*** |
| The four plausible winners: three vets — *Living*'s Bill Nighy, the senior nominee at age 73; *Banshees*' Colin Farrell, a Golden Globe winner; and *The Whale*'s Brendan Fraser, the Critics Choice and SAG Award winner — plus *Elvis*' Austin Butler, a Globe and BAFTA winner. Farrell and Butler hail from best pic nominees; it's been 13 years since this category's winner didn't. Edge to the showier part.<br>**WILL WIN Austin Butler, *Elvis*** | **ACTOR** | Farrell is my pick for his soulful farmer whose life is upended when his best friend severs their bond. But how nice to see *Aftersun*'s Paul Mescal noticed for the kind of subtlety the Academy overlooks. Likewise, the career-crowning work of Nighy, Fraser digging deep in an otherwise divisive film, and Butler as a pop culture giant.<br>**SHOULD WIN Colin Farrell, *The Banshees of Inisherin*** |
| It's between two admired thespians who gave career-best turns in best pic nominees: *Everything Everywhere*'s Michelle Yeoh, the SAG Award winner, and *Tár*'s Cate Blanchett, the Critics Choice and BAFTA winner. Though Blanchett has two previous wins and Yeoh has none — and Yeoh would be the category's first Asian-identifying winner — my sense is that this is breaking for the former.<br>**WILL WIN Cate Blanchett, *Tár*** | ***SAME!***<br>**ACTRESS** | It's getting almost stale to see Blanchett chalk up another honor, but her scalding intensity as Lydia Tár represents a new career high. No other performance this year came close. That said, who wouldn't be thrilled to see Michelle Yeoh grab the gold? As for miracle nominee Andrea Riseborough, she brings nuance to a bundle of clichés, but that doesn't make the movie less pedestrian.<br>**SHOULD WIN *Cate Blanchett, Tár*** |
| The biggest slam dunk of the night is comeback kid Ke Huy Quan, who's already won SAG, Critics Choice and Globe awards. His one loss was at BAFTA to Barry Keoghan, who's nominated here alongside *Banshees* co-star Brendan Gleeson, *Fabelmans* vet Judd Hirsch and *Causeway*'s Brian Tyree Henry.<br>**WILL WIN Ke Huy Quan, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*** | ***SAME!***<br>**SUPPORTING ACTOR** | It's impossible not to root for Quan; the actor's path from child star through decades out of the spotlight to this triumphant return is a narrative too good to ignore. Gleeson and Keoghan both represent worthy competition in *Banshees*, as does the always terrific Henry in *Causeway*.<br>**SHOULD WIN Ke Huy Quan, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*** |
| Angela Bassett was the early frontrunner after her Critics Choice and Golden Globe wins. But Oscar voters have never fully embraced Marvel movies, so this is probably between actresses from two best pic nominees: BAFTA winner Kerry Condon and SAG winner Jamie Lee Curtis. Advantage: scion of Hollywood royalty.<br>**WILL WIN Jamie Lee Curtis, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*** | **SUPPORTING ACTRESS** | Nobody could question Bassett's authority as a grieving queen seeking comfort from the spiritual world but not too broken to show the U.N. Security Council who's boss. She blazed bright every second she was onscreen in the Marvel sequel. If there's an upset, I'd love to see Condon win for her whip-smart work in *Banshees*.<br>**SHOULD WIN Angela Bassett, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*** |



FILMS COURTESY OF STUDIOS (10)



## ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

It has been 24 years since this award was won by a film that wasn't up for best picture, a daunting stat for *Glass Onion* and *Living*. *Top Gun: Maverick* is more about action than dialogue, and thus unlikely. That leaves BAFTA winner *All Quiet* and Critics Choice winner *Women Talking*. Based on their nom tallies — nine and two, respectively — one is clearly more popular.
WILL WIN *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Not one contender in this category can compare to the complexity of last year's standouts, *Drive My Car* and *The Power of the Dog*. (Don't get me started on *CODA* winning for a pretty basic translation from the original French.) That said, Kazuo Ishiguro's elegant work retooling the Akira Kurosawa classic *Ikiru* for an English setting stands above the rest.
SHOULD WIN *Living*

## ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

Five best pic nominees are competing: BAFTA/Globe winner *Banshees*, Critics Choice winner *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Gotham winner *Tár*, *The Fabelmans* and *Triangle of Sadness*. Voters have tended to use this category to reward highly unusual scripts, like *Her*, *Birdman* and *Get Out*, which bodes well for *Everything Everywhere*.
WILL WIN *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

McDonagh seems destined at every festival and awards ceremony to take screenplay but miss out on the bigger honors — the filmmaker's equivalent of "always the bridesmaid …" The glorious musicality of his dialogue and the graceful tonal shifts put it out front for me, but there's also much to be said for the audacious swerves Field takes in *Tár*.
SHOULD WIN *The Banshees of Inisherin*

## DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

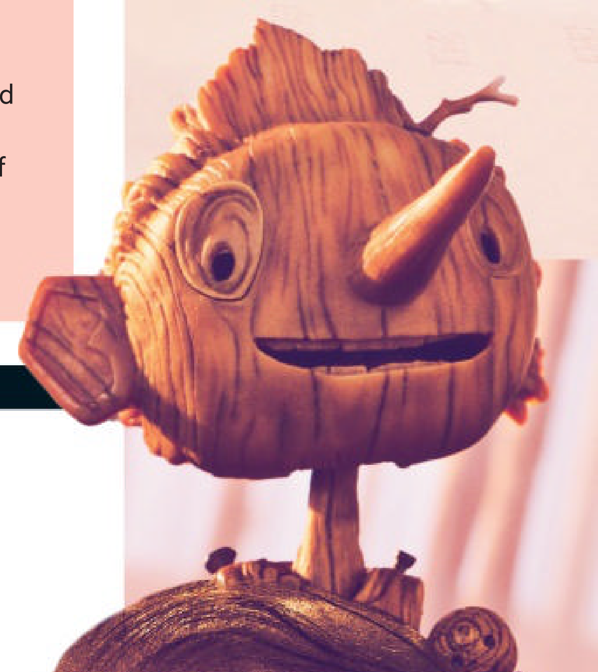
Meditative *All That Breathes* is the doc community's pick. *Citizenfour* winner Laura Poitras' *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* won best film at Venice. *A House Made of Splinters* centers on Ukrainian war orphans. Charming *Fire of Love* was the DGA's pick. But *Navalny*, a thrilling portrait of a Russian resistance leader, won PGA and BAFTA prizes, and voters tend to reward social import.
WILL WIN *Navalny*

A previous winner in this category for *Citizenfour*, Laura Poitras deserves to land another. Her portrait of photographer Nan Goldin as both artist and activist taking on Big Pharma with a personal stake brings narrative propulsion and emotional payoff to rival any fictional feature. The poetic story of the sibling kite whisperers in *All That Breathes* is a close second.
SHOULD WIN *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*

## INTERNATIONAL FEATURE

Only *All Quiet on the Western Front* is also nominated for best picture, which alone almost guarantees a win here. Moreover, only two non-English-language films have ever received more total Oscar noms than *All Quiet*'s nine (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Roma*), and both won this award (but lost best pic). Plus, *All Quiet* dominated at the BAFTAs, even winning best film.
WILL WIN *All Quiet on the Western Front*

At 84, Polish veteran Jerzy Skolimowski created a youthful, vigorous shot of pure cinema in his life of a donkey, intensely moving in its respect for animals as sentient creatures with souls. The momentum here is behind *All Quiet on the Western Front*, but if the mule's out, I'd rather see another "quiet" contender honored, the first-ever Irish-language nominee, *The Quiet Girl*.
SHOULD WIN *EO*

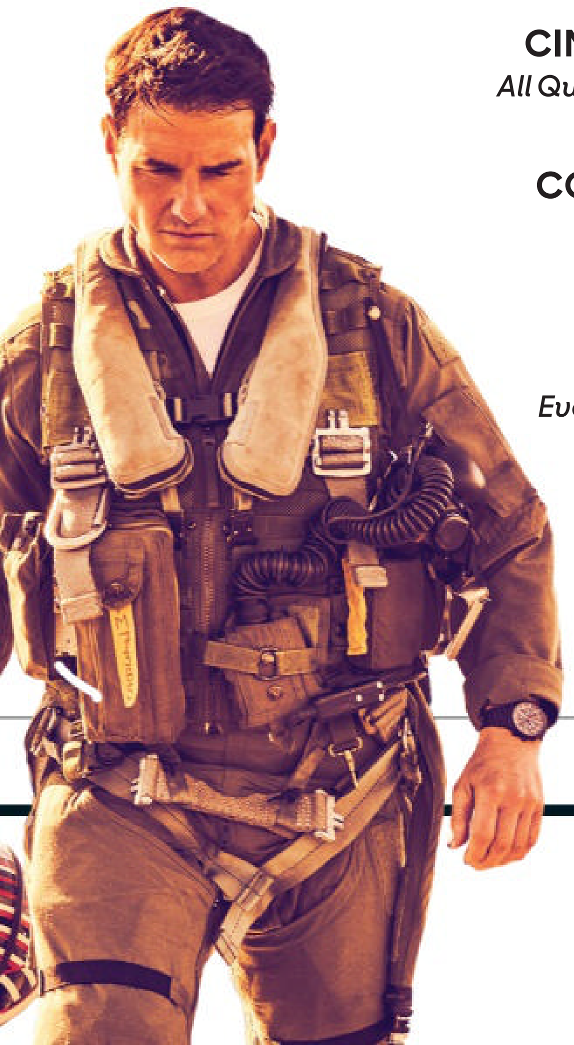


## ANIMATED FEATURE

Guillermo del Toro is one of the most popular people in the business, so having his name on the ballot as part of his acclaimed Netflix stop-motion film's title (it otherwise wouldn't be) will certainly play to the film's advantage, as it has all season. A darker take than the 1940 Disney classic, it has swept every major precursor award there is for animation.
WILL WIN *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*

Guillermo del Toro is one of our greatest storytellers, even if I admired more than loved his bold take on *Pinocchio*. *Turning Red* brought cultural specificity and a freewheeling imagination to a delightful coming-of-age tale. But *Marcel* is the most captivating original of the bunch, its seemingly absurd world-building given surprising weight by its disarming heart and humor.
SHOULD WIN *Marcel the Shell With Shoes On*

## AND FEINBERG FORECASTS THE REST …



**CINEMATOGRAPHY**
*All Quiet on the Western Front*

**COSTUME DESIGN**
*Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*

**FILM EDITING**
*Everything Everywhere All at Once*

**PRODUCTION DESIGN**
*Elvis*

**MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING**
*The Whale*

**SCORE**
*All Quiet on the Western Front*

**SONG**
"Hold My Hand," *Top Gun: Maverick*

**SOUND**
*Top Gun: Maverick*

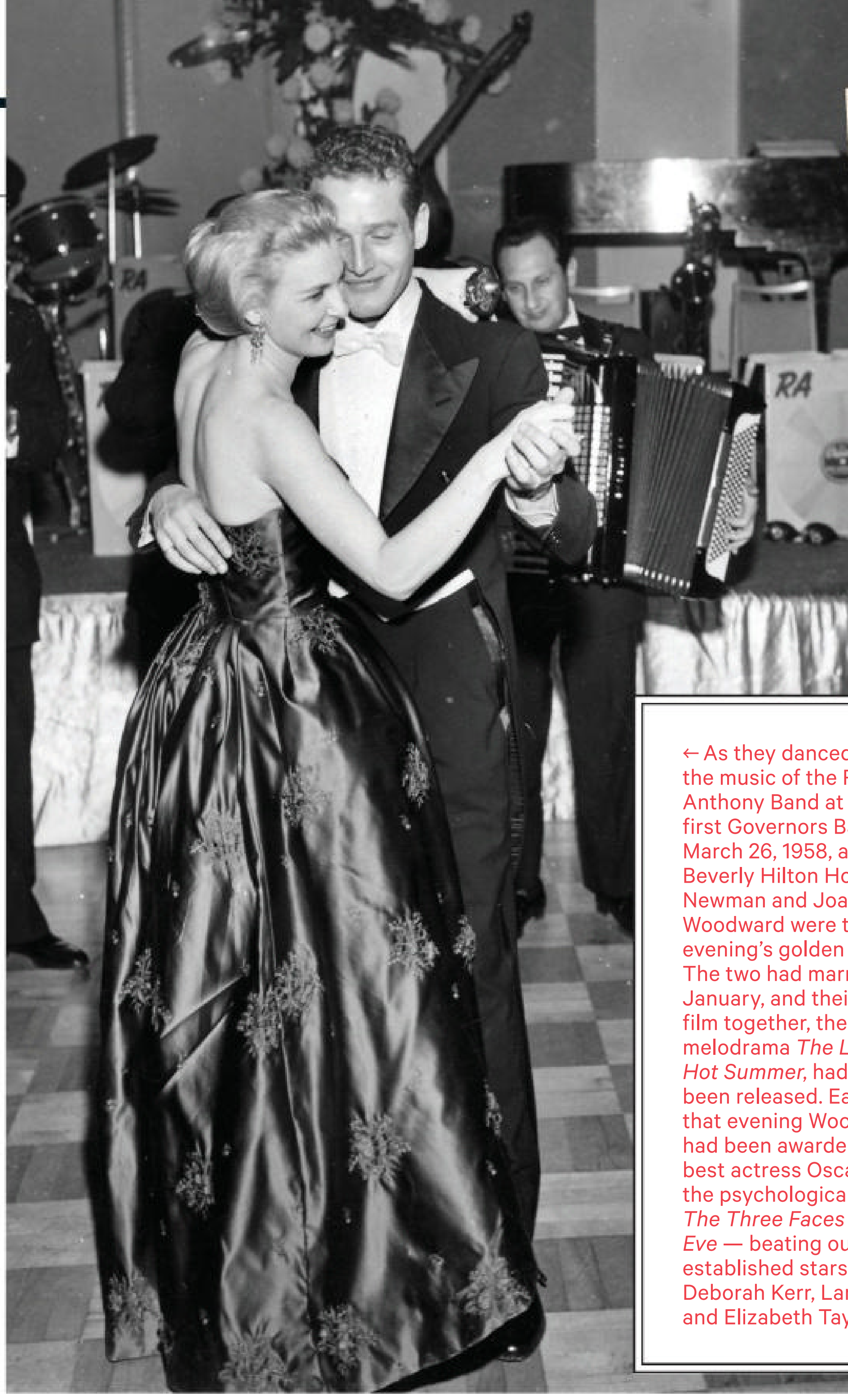
**VISUAL EFFECTS**
*Avatar: The Way of Water*

**ANIMATED SHORT**
*The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*

**DOCUMENTARY SHORT**
*Stranger at the Gate*

**LIVE-ACTION SHORT**
*An Irish Goodbye*

**On March 12, once the curtain comes down** on the 95th Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre, the must-stop afterparty will just be getting started for Oscar nominees — winners and losers alike. This year marks the 65th anniversary of the Governors Ball, but it wasn't always a coveted invitation — or even a tradition. The first Academy Awards statuettes were handed out in 1929 at a banquet in the Blossom Room of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, but the annual banquet was discontinued during the war years and, by 1958, the ceremony had migrated farther down Hollywood Boulevard to the Pantages Theatre. This meant that once the show was over, the stars were left to fend for themselves. So that year, the Academy charged actor and future California senator George Murphy with chairing a post-Oscars dinner dance, which would take place at the Beverly Hilton hotel. Its venue has changed over the years, but with just two exceptions — it was canceled in 1968 because of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and in 2021 because of COVID-19 — the ball has gone on ever since.



← As they danced to the music of the Ray Anthony Band at the first Governors Ball on March 26, 1958, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward were the evening's golden couple. The two had married that January, and their first film together, the steamy melodrama *The Long, Hot Summer,* had just been released. Earlier that evening Woodward had been awarded the best actress Oscar for the psychological drama *The Three Faces of Eve* — beating out such established stars as Deborah Kerr, Lana Turner and Elizabeth Taylor.

1

# Hollywood's Glitziest Afterparty

↑ Celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck almost single-handedly saved the modern-day Governors Ball. By the late '80s, the ball had fallen out of fashion. Some of the biggest stars were skipping the event and heading straight to legendary agent Irving "Swifty" Lazar's Oscar party at Puck's Spago, then located just above the Sunset Strip. After Lazar died in 1993, the Academy invited Puck — seen here previewing the menu for the 2015 bash — to join forces with them. In 1995, he brought his signature smoked salmon pizzas and chicken potpies to his first ball, that year at the exhibition hall adjoining the Shrine Auditorium. It lured the evening's big winners like Tom Hanks and Jessica Lange.

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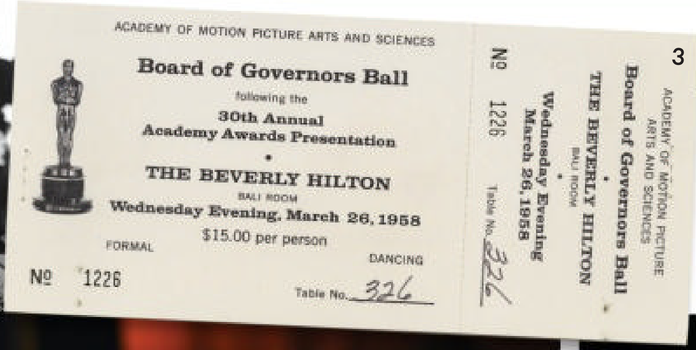


ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Board of Governors Ball

following the

30th Annual

Academy Awards Presentation

•

THE BEVERLY HILTON

BALI ROOM

Wednesday Evening, March 26, 1958

$15.00 per person

FORMAL

DANCING

№ 1226

Table No. 326

3

ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Board of Governors Ball

•

THE BEVERLY HILTON

BALI ROOM

•

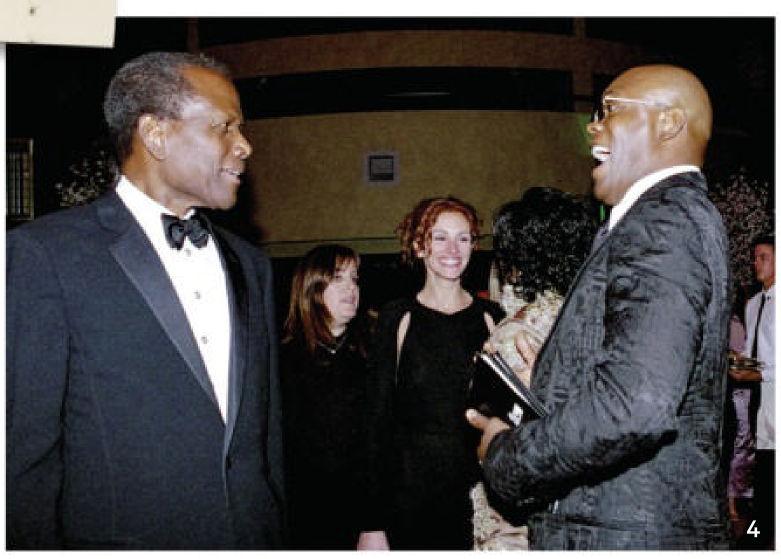
Wednesday Evening

March 26, 1958

№ 1226

Table No. 326

↑ Because Oscar winners aren't known until those telltale envelopes are opened at the ceremony, the winners, for many years, had to return the trophies that were handed out onstage to the Academy so that they could be engraved with their names, which often took a couple of weeks. But in 2010, the Academy sped up the process with an engraving station at the ball where the winners could relax, as Renée Zellweger did after her best actress win for *Judy* in 2020.



# Turns 65

Since 1958, the Academy's annual Governors Ball has hosted an A-lister who's who after the Oscars, with even the most seasoned luminaries becoming awestruck at the star power in the room BY GREGG KILDAY

← Despite the heavy security at the ball, the best actress Oscar that Frances McDormand won in 2018 for *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* went missing for a time after she set it down on a table. A photographer working for Wolfgang Puck noticed a man, Terry Bryant, holding the trophy and seemingly headed for the door. After security was alerted, Bryant, who claimed he was only posing with the gold statuette, was arrested by the Los Angeles Police Department and charged with grand theft. McDormand (pictured here with her son, Pedro) declined to press charges, though, and a year later, just before trial, the district attorney dropped the case.

**1** Leonardo DiCaprio, named best actor for wrestling a bear in *The Revenant*, joined that movie's producer Arnon Milchan as Steven Spielberg took a selfie at the 2016 ball.
**2** *West Side Story*'s best supporting actor George Chakiris and supporting actress Rita Moreno cozied up with their matching Oscars at the 1962 ball.
**3** A ticket to the inaugural Governors Ball cost just $15. This year, invite-only tickets to the ball are $1,500 each.
**4** Samuel L. Jackson (right) congratulated Sidney Poitier, who received an honorary Academy Award at the 2002 Oscar ceremony, as Julia Roberts mingled nearby.
**5** Liza Minnelli, who performed a duet of "There's No Business Like Show Business" with Sammy Davis Jr. at the end of the 1984 Oscars, caught up with Michael Jackson.
**6** Dudley Moore, who was one of the co-hosts of the 1983 Oscar show, with Jessica Lange, best supporting actress winner for *Tootsie*.
**7** Gregory Peck and his wife, Veronique, celebrated his win as best actor for his turn as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the 1963 ball.
**8** Forest Whitaker, best actor for *The Last King of Scotland*, and Jennifer Hudson, best supporting actress for *Dreamgirls*, showed off their trophies at the 2007 ball.
**9** Pals Shirley MacLaine, nominated as best actress for *Irma la Douce*, and Debbie Reynolds, who presented the best documentary award, chatted it up at the 1964 ball.
**10** In 2018, Kobe Bryant, who took home an Oscar for the best animated short, *Dear Basketball*, attended with his wife, Vanessa.
**11** At the 1975 Ball, the Coppola family had reason to celebrate. Frances Ford Coppola won best picture, directing and adapted screenplay Oscars for *The Godfather Part II*; his father, Carmine, won an original score trophy; and his sister, Talia Shire, was nominated as supporting actress.
**12** Ang Lee got his first taste of Oscar gold in 2001 when *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was named best foreign language film.
**13** At the 1972 ball, Peter Bogdanovich, joined by his girlfriend and leading lady, Cybill Shepherd, kept up a good face even though he came up empty-handed for his two nominations (directing, adapted screenplay) for *The Last Picture Show*.
**14** Gwyneth Paltrow, best actress winner for *Shakespeare in Love*, got a kiss from her father, director-producer Bruce Paltrow, at the 1999 ball.
**15** At the first Governors Ball in 1958, Clark Gable sat back as he was joined by (from left) screenwriter/director and Academy president George Seaton, Venice Film Festival director Floris Luigi Ammannati and singer Bobbe Brox.

NEWMAN, JACKSON, MORENO, POITIER, LANGE, PECK, COPPOLA, LEE, BOGDANOVICH, PALTROW, REYNOLDS, GABLE : COURTESY OF © A.M.P.A.S. SPIELBERG, PUCK, BRYANT: KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/GETTY IMAGES. ZELLWEGER: VALERIE MACON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. MCDORMAND: ANGELA WEISS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES.

Pictured here in her upcoming Netflix special, 2010 Academy Award winner Mo'Nique says of the Oscar race: "When you get to the end of it, you should have no regrets."

# MO'NIQUE MAKES PEACE

The Oscar-winning actress and comedian opens up about her long, winding road back from the Hollywood wilderness and how she put her feuds — but not her principles — behind her

BY SETH ABRAMOVITCH

**Mo'Nique is beaming. She's seated on a sofa in** the sunlit living room of her Atlanta home, and she's positively glowing.

"I'm pregnant," she says after I point out her aura. "No, just kidding."

What she is, it turns out, is happy — happier than she's been in a while, says the 55-year-old Oscar-winning comedian and actress. "I'm grateful for that feeling. When you are good on the inside, I believe it shows up on the outside.

"It's a new chapter," she says, "but not because of Hollywood. It's a new chapter because my babies are graduating high school. It's a new chapter because my grandson will be going to kindergarten next year, and my granddaughter to the fifth grade. Those things, for me, are the priority."

But her career, too, is beginning to flourish after an extended fallow period. On Feb. 22, Netflix released a trailer for the comedy special *My Name Is Mo'Nique*, placing its star back in the public eye after what feels like a very long time.

Mo'Nique's cherubic face has been popping up elsewhere, as well. She stars in *The Reading*, a low-budget horror movie now streaming on BET+. And she plays Goldie — a "sophisticated Atlanta strip club owner with swagger and street smarts" — in *BMF*, short for Black Mafia Family, a Detroit-set crime drama that's in its second season on Starz.

"It made sense," she says of her return to the screen. "And it made dollars and cents. And for all those years, it just wasn't making sense. Back then, I didn't feel a glow. I felt disappointment. I felt the same injustices and inequalities that all the Black women who came to Hollywood before me felt. Oftentimes people call that anger. They call it bitterness. They call it unstable. They give it all these titles except what it really is."

That *My Name Is Mo'Nique* exists at all is a major victory for her roller-coaster career. In 2017, Netflix approached her to star in a special and offered her $500,000 to do so. Mo'Nique was characteristically vocal about how she felt about that — that the sum was discriminatory and indicative of a pattern of underpaying Black women. She pointed to eight-figure deals paid to comedians like Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock and Amy Schumer for comparable work. Netflix abruptly called off the negotiations.

Most artists would probably have moved on at that point. Not Mo'Nique. In 2019, she sued Netflix for failing to negotiate in good faith. Surprising just about everyone but Mo'Nique, a federal judge overseeing the case sided with her. The lawsuit ultimately settled out of court in June 2022. *My Name Is Mo'Nique* taped four months later in Atlanta, the city she has called home since 2009.

"This one right here is personal," Mo'Nique teases in the trailer for the special, which debuts globally April 4. "When you walk away from this one, you'll say, 'Now we understand that woman.' "

That's a tantalizing pitch, because Mo'Nique — despite consistently dazzling audiences onstage and onscreen, in everything from her mainstream breakout in 2001's concert film *The Queens of Comedy* to her Oscar-winning performance in 2009's *Precious* — has, up close and personal, proven a difficult read, even to some of her closest friends.

Take, for instance, Lee Daniels, who directed her to that best supporting actress Oscar in *Precious*. Before they made the movie, Mo'Nique and Daniels were virtually inseparable. "We knew each other when there were no cameras on, when there was no red carpet," she says. "We knew each other on 3 a.m. phone calls."

But something transpired in the run-up to Oscar night that placed a wedge between them. It began as a disagreement over awards campaigning: Daniels wanted the full-court press; Mo'Nique, who was told she would not be paid for such work, wanted a breather from an exhausting schedule (she was also hosting a talk show on BET at the time) to spend time with her husband and manager, Sidney Hicks, and their 4-year-old twin sons (they are now 17; she also has a third son, 32, from her previous marriage to Mark Jackson).

Lionsgate, the studio behind the film, reportedly was incensed that she refused to participate in what they felt was a crucial leg of the promotional cycle. Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry, both executive producers on *Precious*, reluctantly entered the squabble, to no avail.

In the end, Mo'Nique and Daniels did not speak for 13 years. In a 2015 *THR* interview for a story about Hattie McDaniel — the first Black actor to win an Academy Award, for *Gone With the Wind*, to whom Mo'Nique touchingly paid tribute in accepting her own Oscar — Mo'Nique alleged Daniels had "blackballed" her from working in Hollywood. She would repeat the allegations in the years to follow, also accusing Winfrey and Perry of having joined forces with Daniels to further rumors that she is a "difficult" performer. (Winfrey and Perry declined to comment for this story.)

But there appear to be the beginnings of a thawing, at least on Daniels' part. If there was a turning point, it was probably the moment he surprised Mo'Nique in the spring of 2022 with an offer to replace Octavia Spencer — who could not make the shoot work with her schedule — in *The Deliverance*, an upcoming horror film for Netflix starring Glenn Close. He then joined Mo'Nique onstage at a concert date in Staten Island and publicly apologized to her.

Mo'Nique calls this new era "a chapter of forgiveness."

**Mo'Nique and Daniels met in 2004 at** Reign, a now-shuttered soul food restaurant on Robertson Boulevard in Los Angeles owned by NFL wide receiver Keyshawn Johnson.

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Mo'Nique was already a well-known commodity in Hollywood, having starred in the UPN sitcom *The Parkers* for five seasons; Daniels had worked in casting and actor management before striking it big by producing 2001's *Monster's Ball*. "Lee comes up to me and says, 'I have something for you that I know you're going to do amazing,' " Mo'Nique recalls in one of several Zoom conversations from her Atlanta home. "I said, 'Thank you.' That was it. No more conversation. A few months later, here comes a call from someone named Lee Daniels for a movie named *Shadowboxer*.' "

An outrageous crime thriller shot in saturated colors, 2005's *Shadowboxer* was Daniels' first directorial effort and follows a pair of contract killers who happen to be stepmother and son, and also happen to be lovers. They are played by Helen Mirren and Cuba Gooding Jr., and the two engage in a particularly graphic sex scene in a graveyard. In *Shadowboxer*, Mo'Nique played Precious (no relation to Daniels' later film of that name), a drugged-out nurse who sleeps with her doctor colleague, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt. The film was trashed by critics but established Daniels' no-holds-barred voice and set the stage for future successes.

**"I saw a genius," says Mo'Nique of** observing Daniels at work. "I saw someone who was fearless, such a visionary, someone unafraid to put these characters together unapologetically. You had Helen Mirren and Cuba Gooding lying in a cemetery, pumping. What are you doing, Mr. Daniels? It was so refreshing and breathtaking."

*Shadowboxer* was the start of a beautiful friendship between Mo'Nique and Daniels. "We never stopped communicating," she says. A few years later, Daniels sent Mo'Nique a script with an unwieldy title: *Push: Based on the Novel by Sapphire* (later changed to *Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" by Sapphire* to avoid confusion with another film called *Push*), a drama about a 16-year-old Harlem girl raised by a monstrously abusive mother. Daniels wanted Mo'Nique to play the mother.

"It was like, 'Lee, what the hell is this?' " Mo'Nique recalls of her reaction to the shocking script, in which the teen (who would be played by Gabourey Sidibe) is raped repeatedly by her father, resulting in two full-term pregnancies, before receiving an HIV diagnosis. "He was like, 'I know, right?' We've always been those two kids on the playground saying, 'You going to do it? All right — if you push, I push.' We've always been that."

*Precious* premiered to an ecstatic reception at Sundance on Jan. 15, 2009. It then screened at Cannes in May, where it received a 15-minute standing ovation. Cannes, however, is where the rift between Daniels and Mo'Nique began, after she had refused to board a flight to France to attend the festival screening or submit to further promotions as long as Lionsgate refused to pay her. Calling from Cannes, she recalls, Daniels told his star, "Mama, I agree with what you're saying. I just don't think it's going to play out good for you." Mo'Nique refused to budge. "And that was a problem," she recalls. "The problem of 'How could this fat Black woman say no to the powers that be in Hollywood?' "

**"Flying to France to promote your turn in** this hit movie sounds kind of fun," I respond. "Why didn't you want to do that?"

Mo'Nique emits a belly laugh. "As I explained to Oprah Winfrey, I said, 'Oprah, I'm doing a talk show. I'm doing a comedy tour. I have a husband and I have babies. I have a little bit of downtime and I'm going to take advantage of it. So I'm not going anywhere because I'm not obligated to go anywhere. I've done my part,' " she says. "So we mutually agreed to disagree. That was it. Next thing I know, I am considered 'difficult' and 'hard to work with.'

**1** Mo'Nique's appearance in the low-budget horror film *The Reading* led to her rapprochement with director Lee Daniels.
**2** The actress in *BMF* on Starz.
**3** In her long-awaited Netflix special *My Name Is Mo'Nique.*

"It was my third marriage," Mo'Nique continues. "My second round of children. So I understood by then that when you sacrifice everything for a place called Hollywood, you wind up being by yourself. I know the history before me. I know those stories. And not only did those women die broke, they died brokenhearted. They died lonely because they gave everything to a business — and in the end it gave them nothing."

**At the 87th Academy Awards, held March 7,** 2010, at the Kodak Theatre (renamed the Dolby Theatre in 2012), Mo'Nique wore a ruched royal blue gown by Tadashi Shoji with white gardenias in her hair — a tribute to McDaniel, who wore the same flowers when she accepted her Oscar in 1939.

"First, I would like to thank the Academy for showing that it can be about the performance and not the politics," Mo'Nique said onstage, earning applause, before turning her thoughts to McDaniel, whom she thanked "for enduring all that she had to, so that I would not have to." She mentioned Winfrey and Perry in her Oscar speech — "because you touched it the whole world saw it," she said — but did not utter Daniels' name, incensing him.

Despite the victory, Mo'Nique says she received a chilly reception from her collaborators. After waiting 40 minutes to take a group photo with the evening's winners, she decided she'd had enough of the Oscars and went back to the hotel with Hicks to put her twin sons to bed. "So when y'all see the photo from the year that I won, I'm not in the picture," she says.

The next morning, Mo'Nique and Daniels had a brief, stilted conversation. Soon after that, she presented him with an award at an LGBTQ event. Mo'Nique assumed the tensions had passed. Several months later, he made her an offer to join the cast of *The Butler.*

The 2013 film starred Forest Whitaker as Cecil Gaines, a real-life African American butler who served for 34 years in the White House. But the part Daniels proposed — Gloria Gaines, Cecil's wife — ultimately went to Winfrey, who had offered to put up financing for the film.

Daniels and Mo'Nique did not communicate after that for several years. But he eventually did reach out, saying he wanted her for the part of Cookie Lyon, the matriarch of a music dynasty, in Fox's frothy *Empire* — a part that instead went to Taraji P. Henson. Around that time, *Butler* screenwriter and *Empire* co-creator Danny Strong tweeted, "Mo'Nique was never offered roles in Empire or The Butler. #SettingRecordStraight." But Daniels confirms that he wanted Mo'Nique for both parts. "Yes, I did," he says. "But I didn't have the power to hire her. There were studios and other producers involved."

There would be more bad blood to come — particularly where Winfrey was concerned. In 2014, Mo'Nique was invited to the Santa Monica home of actress Alfre Woodard for a party in honor of Lupita Nyong'o, who had just been Oscar-nominated for best supporting actress for *12 Years a Slave*. "They invited you if you were a Black woman who had won or been nominated for an Oscar," Mo'Nique explains. "We all had to tell Lupita what our experience was and share in an upliftment get-together."

It was the first time since the 2010 Oscars that Mo'Nique and Winfrey would occupy the same room. A month after those Oscars, Winfrey hosted Mo'Nique's family, but not Mo'Nique, on an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. On it, Mo'Nique's eldest brother, Gerald Imes, confessed to molesting Mo'Nique when she was 7 and he was 13; the sexual abuse lasted for several years, he said.

The sexual abuse was not a secret: Mo'Nique had referenced it while doing press for *Precious*, saying she returned to those dark places to play Mary. But with Mo'Nique's fame peaking post-Oscars, Winfrey called her to inform her that her "brother had called her and he wanted to come on the show to let her know how parents can watch out for predators," Mo'Nique says. "She then said, 'Do you want to come on the show, because he wants to apologize to you?' I said, 'Oprah, I don't want no part of that.' "

Mo'Nique did, however, give Winfrey her blessing to tape the show with her brother. But when it aired on April 19, 2010, she was horrified to see other family members featured in the episode. Not just her brother — who had served 15 years in jail for a different sex offense — but her mother, Alice Imes, her father, Gerald Imes Sr., and another brother, Stephen Imes, who downplayed the abuse on the show, telling Winfrey, "It really isn't what it looks like. It's blown out of proportion."

Mo'Nique maintains that she and Winfrey "had a lengthy conversation" before the episode in which she detailed how she and her mother "were not on good terms. We weren't even speaking. Then I see the show and I can tell that my mother is trying to make a dollar. I know my family." Feeling betrayed, she tried to contact Winfrey to convey her disappointment. "I reached out to everybody I could to try to get to Oprah," Mo'Nique says. "No. Nothing. It just went dead."

That is, until the party in Nyong'o's honor. Spotting Winfrey on a sofa on the second floor, Mo'Nique took a seat next to her. "I said, 'You know we're going to have to talk, right?'

> "Anytime somebody's been like, 'Stay away from this person' or 'This person might not be easy to work with,' I tend to be like, 'Well, let me meet them and talk to them.' "
>
> **DONALD GLOVER**

PREVIOUS SPREAD: JOHN WASHINGTON JR./NETFLIX. THIS SPREAD: *READING*: BET+/EVERETT COLLECTION. *BMF*: WILFORD HAREWOOD/©STARZ/EVERETT COLLECTION. *NAME*: JOHN WASHINGTON JR./NETFLIX.

She said, 'Mm-hmm.' And I just patted her on her knee and got up," she recalls.

Later, the invitees were gathered to address Nyong'o. "When it came to me to speak about my Oscar journey, I said, 'Lupita, run your race the way you want to run it, baby. Because when you get to the end of it, you should have no regrets,' " Mo'Nique recalls.

She continues: "Oprah Winfrey was sitting on my right. And then I turned to her and said, 'Now I need to talk to you.' There were some phenomenal Black women there. You could have heard a pin drop. I said, 'Since you didn't want to return my calls, for whatever reason, I'm going to say this right here.' "

According to Mo'Nique, she then asked Winfrey why she had invited Mo'Nique's parents on her show after she had specifically told her she was estranged from them. She says Winfrey responded that she had only invited her abuser on the show, but that on the day of the taping he showed up with the other family members in tow — which Mo'Nique suspects was a lie. Mo'Nique says Winfrey told her, "I'm going to look into your mother and father being on the show, because I didn't know anything about that," and says she added "something like, 'If I've done anything to offend you, I apologize.' "

**Through the lean times, Mo'Nique relied** on stand-up for income. "I could always pick up a microphone and use my gift," she says. In 2019, at one of her lowest moments — "deep in the whole blackball situation, when nobody was calling or returning calls" — Mo'Nique was stunned to hear from Donald Glover, the creator and star of FX's acclaimed *Atlanta*.

Glover had designed shoes for Adidas and wanted to make a series of short films to promote them. He gathered his core creative team — dubbed Royalty, it includes his brother Stephen Glover, director Ibra Ake, music supervisor Fam Udeorji and fashion guru Swank — to brainstorm ideas.

"We were talking about underutilized performers," Glover says. "Just people like Katt Williams and stuff, where they're not being used as much as they should be or in the way they're the most powerful. I was thinking how I would really love somebody to roast me. And we were like, 'You know — Mo'Nique would be good at that!' "

The resulting spots — in which Mo'Nique casually pokes Glover about his "loaf of bread" tummy as he chops firewood shirtless — showcased her impeccable comic timing.

"Anytime somebody's been like, 'Stay away from this person' or 'This person might not be easy to work with,' I tend to be like, 'Well, let me meet them and talk to them,' " Glover explains. "But she was like the easiest person to work with. I don't try and make it racial, but I feel like most of the time, it's like, 'Well, if I don't use them, where are they going to go?' Like, 'Where are you going to put Mo'Nique?' I felt it was worth a shot."

Adds Glover, "I definitely want to work with her again. I mean, she's a joy to work with, you know? You don't find a lot of people who have the chops for improv the way she does."

Says Mo'Nique: "It felt really good to see this beautiful young Black man surrounded by other beautiful young Black men on his team. It was a breath of fresh air to be on a production where everybody was just pulling for everybody."

Glover wasn't the only port in the storm. Mo'Nique credits another female comic — Roseanne Barr — for her loyalty. "Through the years, that woman has been right there," she says of Barr, whom she met in 2009 when Barr was a guest on *The Mo'Nique Show*. "Never flinching, never wavering. We didn't get caught up in what anybody else thought or anybody else said. I'm grateful for our friendship."

During Barr's racial firestorm, after she tweeted a photo of former Barack Obama senior adviser Valerie Jarrett juxtaposed with a character from *Planet of the Apes*, resulting in her firing from *Roseanne* by ABC, Barr urged Mo'Nique not to get involved.

"She didn't want me to get hurt defending her," Mo'Nique explains. "I said, 'I will stand for right, all day long. Whatever happens with us standing with my sister named Roseanne Barr, let the chips fall where they may. But what I will not do is turn my back on somebody that I know is not a racist."

Recalls Barr, "She has the most soothing presence and voice and she just really comforted me with understanding. And I needed it, too. She heard me. And she knew me. It was a real scary time. And she came out for me like nobody has. I see her attacked all the time. It just makes me so damn mad," Barr says. "When I feel something's not right, I'm going to say it, and I do. And sometimes that's not an appreciated thing from a woman who's not in lockstep with power. Mo'Nique's that way, too."

**Hicks and Mo'Nique met in 10th grade** at Randallstown High School in suburban Baltimore. "Our energies and spirits just connected," she says. First they became best friends. Then roommates. One day, Hicks leaned toward Mo'Nique while sharing a bathroom mirror and gave her a kiss on the lips. "That's been over 16 years ago and we've not been apart since," she says. Eventually, Mo'Nique asked him to be her full-time manager. "He's the best manager that I've ever had," she says. "And I've had the big boys."

Mo'Nique is aware of Hicks' reputation for being almost too present, too involved, too hard-line where maybe a softer touch is required. (She requests that Hicks sit beside her for much of our time together.) She's unbothered by it all. "I did an interview one time and a young Black woman said to me, 'Aren't you nervous to have your husband here? Won't that make you appear weak?' " she recalls. "I said, 'That breaks my heart that you would even think that.' "

On the subject of their open marriage, which they've discussed at length on their podcast *Mo'Nique & Sidney's Open Relationship*, they say it was Mo'Nique's idea originally, but both have calmed down with their extramarital activities. "Life began to happen," she says. "I began to see a strength I had never seen before. He

**1** Mo'Nique onstage at the 2003 *Kings & Queens of Comedy Search*. **2** As the abusive mother (right) in *Precious* (2009). **3** Her acceptance speech for the best supporting actress Oscar for *Precious* paid tribute to Hattie McDaniel.

loved me at my worst. I didn't want to sacrifice that just for a lay. So I grew out of that."

The path to Mo'Nique and Daniels' rapprochement runs directly through Hicks, as all Mo'Nique's dealings do. But it also runs through Houston. That's where an independent filmmaker named Courtney Glaude hails from. Glaude wrote the script for *The Reading* — about a seance that turns into a bloodbath — with Mo'Nique in mind. To get it to her, he made a barter with a fellow screenwriter: In exchange for a pitch deck — a photoshopped presentation used to sell films — the screenwriter would give him Hicks' email.

In the ensuing exchange, Hicks asked what motivates Glaude, and Glaude said he does everything for his young daughter, which got through to Hicks. He agreed to read the script, which he then passed along to Mo'Nique. "I had never seen anything like it before," Mo'Nique recalls of her first brush with *The Reading*. "We were like, 'This is incredible.' So I went to Houston for a week and filmed this movie.' "

The film shot at the height of the pandemic in December 2020. Glaude then sent the Hickses a cut. Unimpressed, they told him to go back to the editing bay and do it again.

And so — unbeknownst to Mo'Nique — Glaude contacted Lee Daniels' producer Simone Sheffield, asking if the director might take a look at his film (which just happened to star Mo'Nique) and give him some pointers on how to make it better. To Glaude's amazement, Daniels agreed.

"He worked on *The Reading* for over five months with me," Glaude says. "He showed me how to nourish the story. He'd be like, 'Why is this scene here? You already said that.' " Daniels helped Glaude reshape and streamline the film down from 128 minutes to a taut, gripping 90.

In a phone call with Daniels, I mention how touching I found that scenario: He in a dark editing bay for hours at a time, helping shape his estranged muse's performance, all without her knowledge of him doing so. There was something almost cinematic about it.

"It's so beautiful," Daniels concurs. "And in that footage I saw the woman that I worked with some 13 years ago. But I realized how much I loved her. And I realized how talented she was."

Recalls Mo'Nique, "We hadn't heard back from Courtney for months, maybe a year. Then we finally get the film back and it's incredible."

Not long after that, the phone rang: It was Daniels. "Not only did I want to reach out to her," he explains, "but I realized I wanted to work with her again. It's crazy, sometimes, how life is."

Almost Christmas

Mo'Nique and husband and manager, Sidney Hicks, with their twins (front row) and Hicks' son from a previous relationship, at a 2016 screening of the feature *Almost Christmas* in Atlanta.

Mo'Nique was stunned to hear Daniels' voice after 13 long years. "He says, 'Do you know I had to sit with your ass for five months?' " she says with a laugh. "For five months he edited the film. And he says to me and my husband that night, 'Guys, I don't want anything for it. Mo, I'm just glad I could do it. And I'm proud for the performance that you did.'

"He did not have to edit this film," she continues, still visibly moved by the gesture. "So we asked Lee if he would take a producer credit and give him a percentage of the film. Because what he did was beautiful. I think that speaks volumes. It really does."

In the same phone call, Daniels offered Mo'Nique the role in *The Deliverance*. "He was like, 'OK, so I want to talk to you about this part.' I said, 'Lee, we can't talk about a part until we talk.' And he was like, 'I know.' And then we had a real conversation. That was the moment that he said, 'I'm going to apologize to you and your family for anything I've done to hurt y'all.'

"And what I said to him was, 'I appreciate that and we are grateful for the apology. But because it happened publicly, you have got to apologize publicly.' And you know what he says? 'Tell me when and where,' " she says.

Adds Daniels, "There was no way that I was not going to apologize for anything that she thought that I did to her."

A few days later, he stood alongside Mo'Nique at Staten Island's St. George Theatre, saying, to whoops of approval from the crowd, "I am so sorry for hurting you in any way that I did. She was my best friend. My best friend. [*Precious*] was God working through both of us. And we're going to fuckin' do it again."

Says Mo'Nique of that moment: "I don't know if it's ever been done in history — that a big Hollywood director came out and apologized to an actress for a wrongdoing." Adds Daniels,"I'm just happy to have my friend back."

Regarding her detente with Netflix, Mo'Nique says, "We sat down with our attorneys, they had their attorneys, you go to mediation, and we were able to come up with something that everybody was good with. I think when adults come together in the room and sit down and have a reasonable conversation and a logical conversation, you work things out."

"Mo'Nique is an incredible talent who has proven herself across TV and film, winning well-deserved acclaim for projects spanning genres from comedy to drama," says Tracey Pakosta, Netflix vp comedy series. "She's built a loyal audience over the years, and we think her fans will love these new Netflix projects."

Of course, not all of Mo'Nique's feuds have been resolved. She still demands and expects public apologies from Winfrey and Perry, who fall radio silent whenever the subject turns to her. (One exception was during a 2018 interview promoting *A Wrinkle in Time*, when, asked about negative remarks made about her by Donald Trump and Mo'Nique, Winfrey responded: "It's a law that when you meet negative with negative, you just have a combusted negative force of negative energy. You have to rise above it. You have to transcend it. You have to be the light. And it only takes a little bit of light to banish the darkness.")

She's also at war with D.L. Hughley, after they squabbled over top billing at a show in Raleigh, North Carolina, last June. Things escalated quickly, with each side posting its contracts on social media. "I can't tell you how many female comedians have had to deal with that," she says. " 'Just because I'm a man, I'm supposed to go headline the show.' Well, no, that's not the case." During their heated exchanges, Mo'Nique surfaced a news story involving a Hughley family member and an alleged sexual assault, insinuating that he did not stand up for his family; backlash led to a public apology from Mo'Nique to Hughley's family, but not the comedian: "I meant every motherfucking thing I said [about him]," she said in a concert appearance. Hughley would not comment for this story.

The star is ever vocal — especially when she believes she is standing up for what is right.

At one point during last summer's location shoot in Pittsburgh of *The Deliverance*, Mo'Nique and Daniels took a stroll along the Ohio River. "We were taking in the beautiful scenery," she says. "And Lee looks at me and says, 'Why didn't you just shut up during all those years?' And I said, 'Had I shut up, you and I wouldn't be walking down this river.' " THR

*KINGS:* MAURY PHILLIPS/WIREIMAGE. *PRECIOUS:* LIONS GATE/EVERETT COLLECTION. OSCAR: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES. HICKS: PARAS GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR UNIVERSAL PICTURES.

Illustration by **Darya Shnykina**

# NEXT YEAR'S OSCAR INCLUSION STANDARDS ARE ALREADY STIRRING DEBATE

While the rules are well-intentioned, some producers say gathering data is confusing and bumps up against privacy laws: 'How are we going to know who's gay when it's illegal to ask?' **BY REBECCA KEEGAN**

**Last fall, an independent filmmaker was** filling out an online form to put forward his movie for Oscar consideration when some questions on the Academy's submissions site caught him off guard. The site asked about his cast and crewmembers' race, gender and sexual orientations, and had some questions about their health — whether they had autism, for instance, or dealt with chronic pain or mental illness.

"I don't know, maybe someone on my crew was neurodivergent," this filmmaker says. "It's not my place to ask. Did they do their job? Great. And how are we going to know who's gay when it's illegal to ask people?"

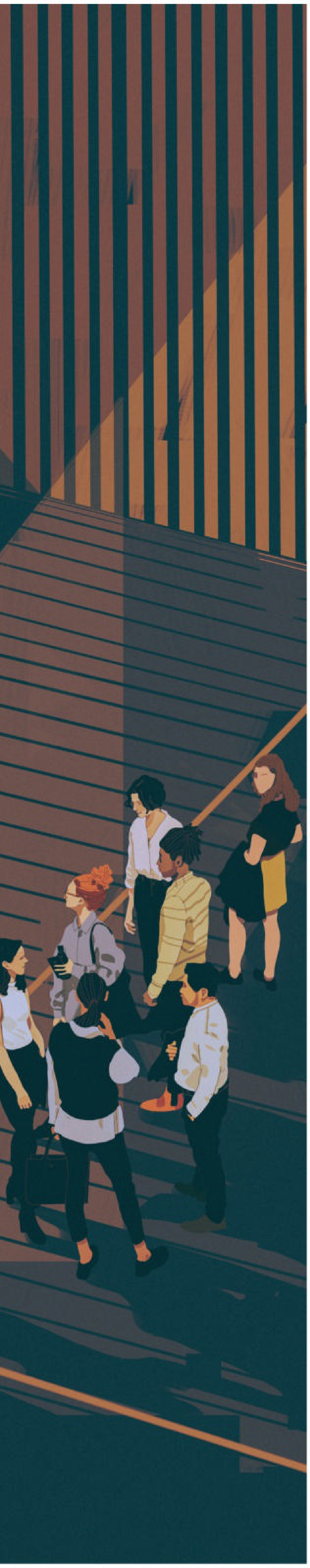
The questions are part of the Academy's new representation and inclusion standards for Oscar eligibility (RAISE), which the organization started rolling out in 2021 in preparation for making certain benchmarks mandatory by next year's awards season. The goal is to spur more inclusive hiring in the film business, but some producers who are trying to comply say the process is cumbersome at best and privacy invading at worst.

"The intention is commendable, but a lot of the questions I felt uncomfortable asking," says another producer. "I wasn't going to write to all the actors and ask what their sexual orientation is. And if it's not something offered up on their bio, are you really going to say, 'Hey, are you disabled?' "

Says one studio source, "We want to look supportive of the effort, but legally, we can't ask a lot of these questions."

The Academy says it doesn't expect production companies to know every demographic detail about their workers. "We acknowledge that not everyone will disclose that information," says Academy executive vp impact and inclusion Jeanell English of the questions. And despite the reservations of producers like these, English says, the first two years of the program have seen "overwhelmingly high participation," noting that the "majority of films that submitted Oscar submission forms completed a version of RAISE." Many productions provided even more information than the Academy required, she says. "Sometimes the response was, 'Wow, this has actually helped me think about what I'm doing on set, and this exercise is valuable.' Others said, 'I am really proud of what I'm doing, and I want to highlight it.' Others said, 'Hey, I haven't quite met this standard, but I'm going through this just to practice what it could look like for us in the future.' "

When the new rules go into effect for next year's Oscars, they will require that a film meet two of four inclusion standards



to be eligible for best picture (see right). A film could meet the onscreen standard, for instance, by having one of its lead or supporting actors come from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group or by having a storyline centered on an under-represented group, including women, LGBTQ people and people with disabilities. It could meet the industry access and opportunity standard by offering a paid internship and below-the-line training opportunities for people from underrepresented groups.

But some studio sources and independent producers, who spoke off the record because they didn't want to appear anti-inclusion, say the standards can be byzantine to understand and difficult to gather data for. Multiple studio sources say when they got to the disability/health questions on this year's submission forms, they largely skipped them.

"When I first looked at it, I'll be honest, I really freaked out," says one source. "I felt like I was looking at my taxes. Everybody at the studio looked at each other like, 'What do we do with this?' "

The introduction of the RAISE standards is part of Aperture 2025, a broad slate of inclusion policies the Academy passed in 2020, which also included adding mandatory annual unconscious bias training for Academy staff and setting a fixed number of 10 best picture nominees starting in 2021. Aperture 2025 follows on the membership goals the organization set — and met — following the #OscarsSoWhite controversy in 2016. Today, 34 percent of Academy members identify as women, up from 25 percent in 2015, and 19 percent are from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, up from 8 percent in 2015.

The Academy isn't unique in asking the kinds of questions that are in the RAISE forms — the standards are modeled after the British Film Institute's diversity standards used to determine some U.K. funding eligibility and some BAFTA categories. The Independent Spirit Awards also ask some of the questions as part of its submission process.

Most major studios have procedures to gather diversity and inclusion data about their employees and productions; it's typically self-reported and compiled by DEI departments. Getting that information for films that studios acquire after they're made is trickier, and for indie producers, the process of submitting to these awards bodies can be downright dizzying. One producer said she had to create spreadsheets to gather the percentages the Academy wanted and that she kept getting logged out of the Academy's site, which she called "clunky." (The Academy says its system automatically calculates percentages for a production, but users say it's not intuitive.)

## TO QUALIFY FOR A BEST PICTURE NEXT YEAR ...

Your film must meet two of the four standards:

**STANDARD A : Onscreen**

*The film must meet one of the following:*

- At least one of the lead or significant supporting actors is from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group.
- At least 30 percent of all actors in secondary and more minor roles are from an underrepresented group.
- The main storyline, theme or narrative of the film is centered on an underrepresented group.

**STANDARD B : The Team**

*The film must meet one of the following:*

- At least two of the creative leadership positions and department heads, such as the director, cinematographer or costume designer, are from underrepresented groups, and at least one of those must belong to an underrepresented racial or ethnic group.
- At least six other crew and technical positions, such as the first AD or script supervisor, are from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group.
- At least 30 percent of the film's crew is from an underrepresented group.

**STANDARD C : Access**

*The film must meet both criteria:*

- The distribution or financing company has paid apprenticeships or internships for underrepresented groups.
- The production, distribution and/or financing company offers below-the-line skill development to the underrepresented.

**STANDARD D : Audience Development**

The film must have multiple in-house senior executives from underrepresented groups on the marketing, publicity and/or distribution teams.

The Academy says that in the second year of the rollout, it has added resources to help with the process, directing production companies to sites like Free the Work and Staff Me Up, which maintain databases of cast and crewmembers who self-identify as being from underrepresented groups. The organization also has made it easier to add information anonymously, in response to concerns about privacy. If a production wants to note that an actor or crewmember has a disability, for example, it can do so without specifically naming that person. And it has also fielded input from international productions of forms of underrepresentation that are especially meaningful outside the U.S., such as caste or religion.

The Academy says it is auditing the submissions to confirm that productions are accurately reporting their data. "If we're seeing some information that feels very off from what we know, we might go back and question the production on the methodology they used," English says.

However daunting the process, the standards themselves are manageable in practice, say multiple sources working on films in this year's best picture race. The Academy says that the majority of films producers put forward for the top prize met the threshold, with Standard A, onscreen representation, the most met standard, particularly with women. Standard B, creative leadership and department heads, and Standard C, industry access, were the areas where productions were less likely to meet the benchmark, the Academy said, with many internships put on hold during the pandemic affecting Standard C in particular. Multiple sources said Standard D, which has to do with studio marketing, publicity and distribution units, is also easily attainable, since women and LGBTQ people tend to be well represented in some of those fields.

"When we looked at it, we realized the bar isn't that high," says a source at a streamer. "So far there hasn't been a film of ours that hasn't cleared it."

All of which calls into question the purpose of the standards in the first place. If they're so easy to meet, will they serve the Academy's stated goal of widening the group of people who get to make films? English says they already are. "They've already had a lot of the impact we were hoping for in terms of driving conversations," she says. "This is the first year they're going into effect. We hope that it encourages opportunities for more communities to work on films that are best picture nominees."

# The *Titanic* Oscars, the Most Watched Ever

All but certain to remain that way for all time, the Billy Crystal-hosted 1998 telecast featured a notoriously expensive and high-grossing film, a speech that bombed and a near-fistfight, detailed in this sweeping oral history BY SCOTT FEINBERG

1

**Twenty-five years ago, both** *Titanic* and the 70th annual Academy Awards at which it was crowned best picture made history. The film's victory, however, was not preordained. Its Oscar campaign had to overcome naysayers who first doubted the film would be a success and then held its success against it. As for the ceremony itself, to borrow the title of an earlier British film about the ship that couldn't sink, and then did, it was a night to remember.

### *TITANIC* SETS SAIL AMID PREDICTIONS OF DISASTER

*After hitmaker James Cameron pitched News Corp. president and COO Peter Chernin "Romeo and Juliet on the Titanic," the exec authorized his company's subsidiary 20th Century Fox to make* Titanic *for $110 million, a sizable but not unprecedented budget. But after production got underway, it quickly became apparent that the film was going to cost considerably more, which became the problem of Bill Mechanic, the newly hired Fox Filmed Entertainment chairman. Both Chernin and Mechanic ultimately answered to Rupert Murdoch.*

**BILL MECHANIC (FOX FILMED ENTERTAINMENT CHAIRMAN)** Things went off-track from the get-go. The film was, to me, underbudgeted and put under time pressure because Peter didn't really want to make the movie. It was the general rule that people didn't want Jim to venture out of his lane, which was sci-fi, and here he was making a large-scale romantic epic. So it was to try to get him to do something else by making the conditions too harsh. But that's testing the wrong guy. Jim went off and did everything — like, change way more effects into practical — to control costs. He built the ship and all that. But he just did not have enough time, and he had a release date and a budget that were both impractical. So that's what I walked into: It was out of control, and people put their heads in the sand. Nobody wanted to deal with it.

*The media caught wind of problems.*

4

**JON LANDAU (*TITANIC* PRODUCER)** We had *Time* magazine with a headline that was "Gulp, Gulp, Gulp."

**JAMES CAMERON (*TITANIC* DIRECTOR)** There was a thing called "Titanic Watch" in *Variety*. Every day, they'd do a little box on the front page talking about how much we were over budget and schedule and anything negative they could find. I don't recall another instance where a film was singled out for that kind of abuse.

**MECHANIC** Everyone thought we were idiots and that this was *Waterworld* or *Cleopatra*. Nobody ever said *Gone With the Wind* or one of those that went a little out of control but ultimately worked.

*The film originally was slated for a July 2 release, far outside the traditional awards-season window.*

**CAMERON** I went to Peter and said, "Look, we're going to have a hard time getting the film finished in time — it's still doable, but there'll be some compromises to the quality. With the media landscape the

CAMERON, SHIP: 20TH CENTURY FOX/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. SCREENERS: COURTESY OF JON LANDAU. MIKE NELSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. MECHANIC: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE.

2

**1** *Titanic* stars Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio with director James Cameron on set.
**2** VHS screeners of *Titanic* (requiring two cassettes) were sent to Academy voters.
**3** Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences president Robert Rehme and Geena Davis announced the Oscar nominations Feb. 10, 1998.
**4** A scene from *Titanic*, which won a record-tying 11 Oscars (out of a record-tying 14 nominations) at the 70th Academy Awards.

3

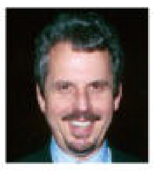
way it is, why don't we push out to Christmas and eat the additional six months of interest?" I said, "It's what a matador does when the bull's charging at him. It's basic aikido. If the opponent is bringing their full force at you, you use the opponent's force against them." And he got it. He said, "Give me 24 hours." He called back the next day and said, "We're going to push until Christmas."

**MECHANIC** It was not an easy movie to make, and it wasn't an easy movie to be the head of a studio for. I was getting it internally — Rupert went after me time and time again. Certainly, if the movie didn't work, I was fired the next day, even if I wasn't fully responsible.

**CAMERON** I had a razor blade taped to the screen of my Avid that said, "Use this if film sucks." In a lot of ways, I'm grateful to the naysayers because they put us on notice — every aesthetic decision, everything that we did had to be impeccable.

**MECHANIC** I said to Jim, and tried to get everybody else to the same point of view, "Ignore the press. You've just got to take it on the chin. We can turn it in our favor. We could be the first $200 million underdog." And that's what happened.

*To address runaway costs, Cameron gave up his directing and producing fees (reportedly totaling $8 million), though he was still paid for his screenplay. In May 1996, Fox, having already spent $135 million on the film, took the extraordinary step of giving up its domestic rights to another studio, Paramount, in return for $65 million. In the end,* Titanic *shot for 160 days and cost more than $200 million, breaking the record held by* Waterworld, *which was a massive flop. It would have to gross hundreds of millions just to recoup its production and marketing costs.*



Mechanic

## *TITANIC* SOARS

**CAMERON** We didn't have a world premiere in Los Angeles, we premiered in Tokyo. I literally said, "I don't care where as long as it's not L.A. Any place that's got a credible film festival, let's do it there." Paramount was against it, but Fox hauled off and did it anyway because they had international rights.

*Then it was time to bring the film to Hollywood.*

**MECHANIC** I've never had another movie where every other studio head and every important person was at the premiere. They weren't coming to enjoy the movie. They'd come to bury us.

*The film opened Dec. 19 in the U.S. to mostly rave reviews (*The New York Times *called it "the first spectacle in decades that honestly invites comparison to* Gone With the Wind*") and historic box office grosses (opposite the Bond film* Tomorrow Never Dies, Home Alone 3 *and* Mousehunt, *it won its opening weekend with $28.6 million). It crossed the $100 million mark in only 12 days and spent an unprecedented 15 consecutive weekends at No. 1. It also set a new box office record in all 57 overseas markets in which it was released.*

**CAMERON** The second weekend — when the film went up instead of going down — gave everybody pause.

**ROB FRIEDMAN (PARAMOUNT MOTION PICTURE GROUP VICE CHAIRMAN)** It just kept going and going and going.

## CAMPAIGNING FOR A GIANT

*The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences then comprised 5,371 voting members, about half its current membership.*

**CYNTHIA SWARTZ (MIRAMAX SENIOR VP SPECIAL PROJECTS)** There weren't that many awards consultants in those days. Campaigns were run by whatever marketing or PR person was at a studio.

**FRIEDMAN** We were obviously the 800-pound gorilla in the game. The whole idea with the movie, from both Fox's perspective and ours, was to conduct ourselves

**1** *Titanic* stars Frances Fisher and Billy Zane arrived at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. Of *Titanic*'s 15 weeks as the No. 1 box office grosser, Fisher says, "That is never going to happen again." **2** *Titanic* producer Jon Landau with his wife and son. **3** *Good Will Hunting* screenwriters Ben Affleck and Matt Damon, flanked by their mothers. **4** *Titanic* best supporting actress nominee Gloria Stuart, then 87. **5** Billy Crystal on a mock Titanic during his opening monologue. **6** Celine Dion performed "My Heart Will Go On," from *Titanic*.

with dignity and not forget the event [the sinking of the Titanic] itself. Jim was always very focused on that. There was always a reverential tone to the campaign, both the direct marketing and the distribution campaign.

**MECHANIC** When you're that big and successful, you have to dial it back. You have to rely on the picture.

**FRIEDMAN** We spent a good deal of our campaign energy on screenings. The movie was in theaters, and we made it available for Academy members to see for free.

**LANDAU** We didn't do Q&As. We didn't do tastemaker events. We didn't do that at that time.

**MECHANIC** I got into a pretty big fight with Jim and Jon about screeners. I didn't want to send out screeners, my arguments being: We had the biggest movie in history, or we were on our way to that; we spent all this money to make the movie; we released it in 70mm; we did everything you could to make people see it in its best form — and then you're going to send it out on a screener, and they're going to watch it on TV sets, and they're going to be talking and taking telephone calls and eating and doing all sorts of stuff? To me, that was the wrong way to do it, and Jim agreed. Then he called back an hour later, saying, "Well, but if you're wrong and we don't get nominated, then you have a problem on your hands." So we sent it. [The film was so long that it required two VHS tapes.]

**CAMERON** There are a few more wrinkles to it now, with digital media and social media and so on. But back then, you just spammed the entire industry media with as much square footage of print ads as you could. It was also a bit more unruly — you could send letters and special film clips, you could do a lot of things that are ruled out now. But, look, politics is politics, and it's always been politics.

*Miramax was coming off a best picture Oscar win for* The English Patient *the previous year, which only made co-chair Harvey Weinstein hungrier. He told* The New York Times, *"It's a battle.* Titanic *has great special effects, but in* Good Will Hunting, *the special effects are the words"; to CNN, he said, "If Jim Cameron is saying size matters, then we at Miramax are saying less is more"; and he told just about anyone who would listen that* Hunting *would emerge an unexpected best picture winner, like* Chariots of Fire.

**SWARTZ** We knew we'd win other things that year, but he thought we could win the whole thing and made us aggressively campaign against fucking *Titanic*!

**LISA TABACK (MIRAMAX DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EVENTS AND PUBLICITY)** Harvey seemed to think he had a chance every year. *Good Will Hunting* was an incredible film that made people feel good and that launched the careers of two of the biggest actors and filmmakers. But that was never going to happen.

## LOTS OF NOMS, BUT NO LEO?!

*On Feb. 10, 1998,* Titanic *landed 14 Oscar nominations, equaling the record that had been held for 37 years by* All About Eve. *And unlike* All About Eve*'s noms,* Titanic*'s came in 14 different categories.*

**CAMERON** We were on a flight back from Europe, it was midmorning, and the pilot came back and told us that we got all these nominations. I said, "Did you get the list?" He said, "Yeah." He stood there in the aisle and read the list of what we were nominated for, and it just went on and on and on. I'm like, "You're kidding me — is this really happening?" But here's the kicker: I looked out the window and was sort of daydreaming after that, and I looked down, and the first thing I saw was icebergs. I was never on a transatlantic flight where I saw icebergs before or since.

*But* Titanic*'s leading man, Leonardo DiCaprio, wasn't nominated for best actor. At a time before social media and the widespread use of email, fans took their displeasure directly to the Academy's switchboards. An Academy spokesperson told* Entertainment Weekly, *"They're*

ZANE: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE. LANDAU: HECTOR MATA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. STUART: VINCE BUCCI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. AFFLECK: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE. CRYSTAL: REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. DION: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. VILANCH: RON GALELLA, LTD./RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES.

*asking if anything can be done to get Leonardo nominated. The calls did not just come from teenagers. One older woman called and said the whole state of Florida was upset."*

**LESLIE UNGER (ACADEMY COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR)** There were a lot of *Titanic* fans peeved that Leonardo DiCaprio wasn't nominated.
**LANDAU** I was disappointed. I think oftentimes the perception of a performance requires the character to have a fatal flaw, and he didn't in that character, but that actually made the character harder to play. Even when we were casting Leo, it was something that Jim had to convince him of, that this part was an acting challenge, just like the other characters he had played.
**MECHANIC** When a movie's that good, it's because the actors are also perfect in their roles. They carried the movie. Certainly the sinking of the ship and all that was done in a spectacular way. But ultimately, why did the movie work? Because people identified with those two characters.

*The film also missed out on a screenplay nom, without which no film had won best picture since* The Sound of Music *32 years earlier.*

**SWARTZ** That's where Harvey's "We have a chance" thing came from.

*Meanwhile,* L.A. Confidential *swept the major critics' awards.* Titanic *was shut out, though it continued to enjoy massive commercial success.*

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**KIM BASINGER (*L.A. CONFIDENTIAL* SUPPORTING ACTRESS)** The real truth is in the tale of a tiny hand purse that I had made. Judith Leiber makes these beautiful crystal handbags. I had them make me one for the Oscars, and on the back, do you know what there was? A dinghy, because I knew what we were up against.
**CAMERON** Look, we had a lot of nominations, but that didn't mean anything to the final outcome. I thought *L.A. Confidential* was a very strong film. It was 50-50 at best. I didn't believe the others had a chance against *L.A. Confidential* or *Titanic*.
**MECHANIC** Success is both admired and hated.

### OSCAR NIGHT ARRIVES

*The ceremony took place at the Shrine Auditorium on March 23, 1998. DiCaprio did not attend. But the nominees and many other notables — including civil rights icon Rosa Parks, a guest of Spike Lee, whose* 4 Little Girls *was nominated for best documentary feature — made their way down the red carpet.* Titanic, *at that time, had been atop the box office for 14 weeks and had grossed $495 million domestically and $1.2 billion worldwide.*

**LANDAU** I was sitting with my mother [Edie] one row in front of Jim. It was a thrill to be able to share the evening with her. My mother, in her own right, was a producer, and had actually been nominated [27 years earlier] with my dad [Ely] for a [Martin Luther King Jr.] documentary they had done called *King: A Filmed Record ... Montgomery to Memphis*.
**CAMERON** I'd been to the Oscars three times before because my films had garnered a number of nominations for sound, visual effects, art direction, things like that, and I'd always gone in support of the nominees. I had never been nominated myself. Now there was a whole other layer. I was like, "Shit, I might have to make a speech. I might have to make more than one speech. Oh, fuck."
**BEN AFFLECK (*GOOD WILL HUNTING* SCREENWRITER, WITH MATT DAMON)** We took our moms. Everyone's like, "It's so nice you took your moms." And we're like, "Who the fuck else were we going to take? You think our moms were going to let us take somebody else?"
**CAMERON** The strap on [my then-wife] Linda [Hamilton's] dress broke, so I'm trying to hold up the back where the strap broke. And my tux came together at the very last second. The tailor was supposed to meet us at the Four Seasons before we went over to the Oscars. The guy never showed up, and my pants are three inches too big. So with one hand, I'm holding up my pants, and with the other, I'm holding up Linda's dress. That was our entire fricking evening.

*Gil Cates was producing the show. Louis J. Horvitz was directing, and Billy Crystal was hosting for the sixth time, supported by a team of writers.*

**BILLY CRYSTAL (HOST)** Gil Cates was a great producer. Gil and I did six together, and I loved him dearly.
**MARC SHAIMAN (70TH OSCARS WRITER)** No one has done a better job hosting the Oscars than Billy. People have done as great, of course — Johnny Carson, Bob Hope and some who have done it in the past 25 years — but no one's ever done it better than Billy. I don't think anyone ever could. He was born to do that.
**ROBERT REHME (ACADEMY PRESIDENT)** He was this lovable guy. He was very well liked by the public.
**LOUIS J. HORVITZ (70TH OSCARS DIRECTOR)** You felt like you were coming home when you saw Billy on Oscar night.
**BRUCE VILANCH (70TH OSCARS WRITER)** The audiences are bigger when there are big movies, and *Titanic* was the biggest movie of all time until *Avatar*, so we knew it was going to be a big turnout.

*The show began with Rehme welcoming everyone, then tossing to a montage of best picture clips into which Crystal had inserted himself.*

**HORVITZ** Billy had his own people that made those films with him. He never showed them to anyone until the day of the show. He didn't want it to leak.
**VILANCH** We were putting together the opening movie. As we were pitching ideas for *Titanic*, I don't remember who said this, but we were talking about Billy being the guy in white on the stern of the ship who looks over at Kate Winslet. Someone said, "Wouldn't it be funny if it was Kevin Costner and off-camera someone says, 'Have you ever been involved in a disaster this big?' and he says, '*The Postman*?' " So Billy called him and Costner said yes, which stunned us. He decided to own his failure.

Vilanch

**CAMERON** It was clear that the producers were having fun — they were spoofing, but it wasn't nasty. It was a celebration of the film. I thought, "Well, maybe we don't win, but at least we're winning in that our peers are celebrating us and the success." I've noticed in the years since it's become more of a roast. There's a bit of snark in it. I remember what I was thinking with *Avatar* when they were making fun of blue people and doing stuff like that. It didn't have the same vibe.

*Crystal then appeared onstage aboard a set that was made to look like a sinking ship; did a monologue (cracking about the still-unfolding Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, "There's a billion people watching the show tonight; Linda Tripp is taping it");*

*and, per tradition, started singing a medley about the best picture nominees (“*L.A. Confidential, *you could be the iceberg tonight!”). Crystal also engaged with the nominees seated closest to the stage.*

**CRYSTAL** You had Jack [Nicholson, a best actor nominee for *As Good as It Gets*] in the front row who was always sort of my partner, and I remember coming off the stage to sing to him. I had planted a little camera, an insta-camera — this was when we actually used cameras instead of phones — by a speaker in the front, and I came down, and Helen [Hunt, a best actress nominee for *As Good as It Gets*] took a picture. I think I was sitting on Jack’s lap or something. And then you had Matt and Ben.

Shaiman

**AFFLECK** That’s exactly the moment that I remember the most. I was 25 — I was like an assistant — and it hadn’t hit me. I remember talking to Matt, and we’re like, “We’re not going to win, and this is all going to blow over.” We never really believed. We didn’t understand, we didn’t have the ability to contextualize what it meant. Literally the year before, in Somerville, Massachusetts, we had watched the show from a shitty little apartment and done an Oscar pool and watched Billy Crystal. And there he was, and he starts singing, “Matt and Ben! Ben and Matt!” I thought, “This is one of those weird dreams.”

*Crystal popped onstage and off throughout the rest of the night. There were musical performances by Aaliyah, Michael Bolton and, of course, Celine Dion (“My Heart Will Go On” while wearing the necklace central to* Titanic*). Presenters included Madonna and Arnold Schwarzenegger. The leading lady of the 1933 classic* King Kong, *Fay Wray, received a special introduction. Martin Scorsese presented an honorary Oscar to Stanley Donen, who sang and danced. And there was a segment where 70 past acting Oscar winners were convened for a “class photo” that the telecast teased as “the greatest collection of Oscar winners ever assembled.”*

### *TITANIC* BEGINS DOMINATING

*The film’s first nine wins came for art direction, cinematography, costume design, film editing, original dramatic score, original song, sound, sound effects editing and visual effects.*

**CAMERON** When they called my name for the first time, which was for editing, I’m like, “Oh, shit. I’ve got to get up in front of whatever, a billion people, and I’m holding my pants up.” Try to remember your speech in the middle of that!

**BILLY ZANE (*TITANIC* SUPPORTING ACTOR)** As it just kept ratcheting up, we thought, “Wow, this is amazing. We’re making history.”

*Oh, and a fight almost broke out between Cameron and Weinstein.*

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**CAMERON** I didn’t know Harvey from Adam. I didn’t know anything about him other than what I had learned from Guillermo del Toro. Guillermo and I had been close friends since 1991. He had told me the horrible shit that Miramax pulled on him when he made his first American commercial film, *Mimic*, and they fired him. The actors, led by Mira Sorvino, kind of revolted and wouldn’t work until they brought him back. Then, when the film was successful and well regarded, Harvey sort of jumped up to take praise for the movie. And so I’m on my way back to my seat with my editing Oscar, and this guy’s jumping up to introduce himself, saying, “If you want to come to work at a place that’s a friend of the artist, a friend of the filmmaker” — he’s holding his hand out, and I just blew him off. It was just an ugly little moment. But, yeah, I did defend Guillermo and I called Harvey on his bullshit, and then he got very loud and verbally abusive and almost potentially physically violent. And he was about to get clocked by an Oscar — which would’ve been highly appropriate, I think. But I wasn’t thinking about it in those terms; it was just the weapon at hand. The hysterical thing about the whole moment was people around us were saying, “Not here! Not here!” It was kind of like, “It’s OK if you boys fight out in the alley, but don’t do it here at the Academy Awards!”

### NON-*TITANIC* WINNERS TAKE THE STAGE

*Basinger won best supporting actress for* L.A. Confidential.

**BASINGER** I kept saying, “The lady from *Titanic* [Gloria Stuart, whose film career had begun in the 1930s and who was then, at 87, the oldest Oscar nominee ever], that lady’s going to win it. It’s just the way it is.” She had seniority! In fact, I looked over there when they called my name and thought, “What’s she doing? She’s not walking to the podium.” Then I remember [*L.A. Confidential* director] Curtis [Hanson] poking me in the back. [Basinger’s then-husband] Alec Baldwin’s mouth was moving, saying, “Get up, get up, get up. You

BASINGER: HECTOR MATA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. CAMERON: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. *TITANIC*: 20TH CENTURY FOX/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. SHAIMAN: DAVID X PRUTTING/PATRICK MCMULLAN VIA GETTY IMAGES. HIER: RON GALELLA, LTD./RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES.

**1 & 2** Cameron's acceptance speech was not well received. Quoting his own script, he shouted, "I'm the king of the world!" referring to a scene where Jack shouts in exhilaration at the ship's bow. Cameron says he realized it didn't land as intended when he "walked backstage and Warren Beatty had this look on his face like, 'What the fuck did you just do?' "
**3** From left: Oscar winners Kim Basinger, Robin Williams, Helen Hunt and Jack Nicholson.

won!" I thought, "OK," and I tried to get up. It was a heavy dress. I thought I was going to faint because my legs were gone by then. Actually, it was Jack Nicholson who helped me up the stairs. I'll never forget that as long as I live.

*Robin Williams won best supporting actor for* Good Will Hunting, *thanked Affleck and Damon ("I still want to see some ID") and said "mazel tov" to "the mishpucha Weinstein." Helen Hunt won best actress for* As Good as It Gets.

**CRYSTAL** Robin won, and that was very emotional for me because we were like brothers. He was incredible in the film, but right up until the SAG Awards, everyone thought that Burt Reynolds was going to win — he was fantastic in *Boogie Nights*, and there was a lot of sentiment for him at that point in his career. But then Robin won at the SAG Awards, and I was like, "OK, I think he's going to win this." I remember being onstage — stage left — when he won and walking out after he finished his speech, and we had this wonderful embrace.

**HELEN HUNT (*AS GOOD AS IT GETS* LEAD ACTRESS)** I had never been in that world at all. I had won for this movie a couple of times [at other awards shows], so I didn't feel like, "Oh my God, this couldn't possibly happen!" But at the same time, you're sitting next to Judi Dench and Julie Christie, some of the greatest actors ever. You certainly aren't polishing your bookshelf to put your Oscar on it. The whole thing's a bit of a blur. I don't blackout drink, but that's probably what it's like. It was, for me, pretty out-of-body.

*Rabbi Marvin Hier, the founder and head of West L.A.'s Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance, and his colleague Richard Trank were nominated for* The Long Way Home, *a Holocaust documentary made at the center.*

**RICHARD TRANK (*THE LONG WAY HOME* PRODUCER)** We were sitting in the section with everybody from *Titanic*. The night before, I couldn't sleep, so I went into the den at 1 o'clock in the morning and turned on the TV to try and tire myself. And what comes on? *The Godfather Part II*, one of my all-time favorite movies. So when Robert De Niro walked out onstage to present the Oscar for best documentary feature, I remember turning to the rabbi and saying, "I think we're going to win."

*It was Hier's second Oscar win. When he left the stage, Crystal cracked, "What a night when your rabbi wins an Oscar! First my best friend, now my rabbi! Who's next?"*

**RABBI MARVIN HIER (*THE LONG WAY HOME* PRODUCER)** When I walked offstage, Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau were standing there. Jack said, "You know, if I had any idea that I could have won one of those just going to yeshiva, I could have saved a fortune on acting school!"

*Nicholson won best actor for* As Good as It Gets *and cracked, "I've had a sinking feeling all night."*

*Lemmon and Matthau announced* Good Will Hunting *as the winner for best original screenplay. Affleck and Damon gave a spirited acceptance speech that they acknowledged was inspired by Cuba Gooding Jr.'s from the year before.*

**AFFLECK** They brought out Lemmon and Matthau to present screenplay, and I thought, "Huh. Maybe they [the people behind the telecast] think we're going to win." When they read our names, it was shocking. It's like — did you ever spin out in a car on the freeway? You know that feeling of being out of your body and disconnected? I remember Alec Baldwin grabbed us offstage and he was like, "Remember this! Remember this!" I was just like, "I'll remember you grabbing me."

### CAMERON CROWNS HIMSELF "KING"

*Warren Beatty presented the best director Oscar to Cameron, who closed his acceptance speech by declaring, "Mom, Dad, there's no way that I can express to you what I'm feeling right now — my heart is full to bursting — except to say, 'I'm the king of the world!' " Not since Sally Field declared, "You like me!" did an Oscar acceptance speech trigger so much backlash.*

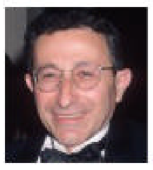
**HORVITZ** Cameron's out there and he's going on, "I'm the king of the world!" I'm going, "You're an asshole!"

**MECHANIC** If he had done that before voting closed, we would have lost. That's the sort of thing that would cost you winning.

**LANDAU** I took it exactly the way Jack meant it in the movie: "This is the best day of my life!" He was quoting his own movie. I just thought, "OK, what a great way to tie it to the film." I think people missed the part, "I feel like ..."

**CRYSTAL** I think it's something that he regrets to this day. I haven't won an Oscar, but I've won Emmys and things like that, and you get lost in the moment. You think you're prepared, but you're not.

**CAMERON** I'll tell you exactly when I first realized it [was going to be a problem]: when I walked backstage and Warren Beatty had this look on his face like, "What the fuck did you just do?" He was just looking at me like, "You poor boob, what the fuck did you just do?" I went, "Oh, was that not cool? OK." I mean, obviously I've analyzed that [since]. My wife at the time, Linda, had said, "Well, if you're going to quote a line from the movie, and then quote it with gusto." I'm like, "Well, I can do that." What I realized is, the problem with it is that it's too self-referential and seen as hubristic — not just the semiotics of "I'm the king of the world," but the scenario of quoting your own movie as if every person in the audience is a big fan, because there were a lot of people in that audience that did not vote for *Titanic*. In my mind, it was celebratory — I was just stating how I felt. In fact, that's exactly what I said. I was talking to my parents. If you look at a transcript, I say, "Mom, Dad, I know you're


Hier

back there,” because they were in the back of the house. I said, “I can’t tell you how I feel right now except to say that I’m the king of the world!” Meaning, talking to my parents, saying, “I feel pretty great right now.” That was it. What I wasn’t saying was, “I’m showing all y’all motherfuckers how it’s done, and yes, I’m the king of the world. I’m all that.” That’s not what I was saying. But, of course, that’s what they heard. And, of course, as a director, I’m supposed to be better than that. I’m supposed to know what the audience hears — how the line actually lands is part of the art form.

### *TITANIC* GETS THE LAST LAUGH

*The telecast was running long — Russell Carpenter, accepting the best cinematography Oscar for* Titanic, *had said, “We’re running so late, this is becoming kind of a Depends moment for me” — and it ended up being the longest show to date, at three hours and 46 minutes. To close the ceremony, Sean Connery announced that the best picture winner was* Titanic, *bringing its total to 11 Oscars, tying the record held by* Ben-Hur *for 38 years. Landau and Cameron went onstage; Landau spoke first, then Cameron.*

**HORVITZ** What does Cameron do? He goes out there and he goes, “Let’s have 15 seconds of silence for the victims.” We’re going, “Jesus Christ! We don’t have time!” Gil’s going, “You motherfucker!” The network’s screaming, “You can’t play him off!” I’m just trying to get off the air because of the restrictions of running into the East Coast news, so you’re going, “Jesus Christ, get off the air!” If I run into the news, we owe money.

**1** DiCaprio and Winslet at the 2016 Oscars, 18 years after *Titanic* won (more on page 67).
**2** From left: Kathy Bates, Rochelle Rose and Fisher in *Titanic*.

*Now it was time to party, especially for Team* Titanic, *many members of which headed to the Governors Ball, then to an afterparty in a tented parking lot in Beverly Hills and eventually to the penthouse of the Chateau Marmont.*

**LANDAU** My role as a producer is to protect the director — but every now and then, you’ve got to look out for yourself. We’re going backstage, and I look at Jim and I look at Sean Connery, and I lean over to Jim and go, “Jim, I’m standing in the middle or I’m going to get cut out of the photo.”

**ZANE** I remember the afterparty, being invited up to the terrace, tie loosened, champagne in hand, the lights of the city below. A night to remember indeed.

**ROCHELLE ROSE (*TITANIC* ACTRESS)** Jack Nicholson invited me to an afterparty at his house, but I declined the offer to stay with my *Titanic* family. I had never met him before, and it was obviously tempting because he’s such a legend. But it was a *Titanic* evening.

### THE TELECAST’S RATINGS COME IN

*The telecast’s ratings were massive: It averaged 57.25 viewers throughout, up 29 percent from the year before, and crushing the previous record of 48.28 million from 1995, the year of* Forrest Gump.

**CRYSTAL** When they said it was the highest of all time, I thought, “Well, great, and maybe we can break it next year.” It wasn’t like it was a fantastic feeling. But now I’m overwhelmed by it and grateful for being there that night. I happened to be hosting that night, but it was really more about the movies. I don’t think it will ever be approached. I don’t think it can be.

*Crystal received another call the day after the show that was even more meaningful to him.*

**CRYSTAL** My assistant Carol says to me, “Johnny Carson’s on the phone.” I said, “Are you sure it’s him? Is it Marty Short?” “No, it’s him. He called himself. No assistant.” I started sweating like Albert Brooks in *Broadcast News*, took a deep breath and said, “Hi, Johnny.” There was that voice, clear as a bell, the great Johnny Carson voice, and he went on and on about how much he loved the show and what I did. He said, “I’m watching it and I go, ‘Look at what this guy is doing!’ My wife says to me, ‘Why don’t you call him and tell him?’ So I’m doing that.” It meant everything to me.

*But Mechanic did not get a call.*

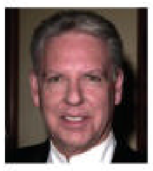
**MECHANIC** Rupert never said, “Congratulations.” Never said, “Good job.” I didn’t get a bonus any bigger than the year before. Sumner Redstone [the head of Viacom, owner of Paramount] was the one who came up to me and said, “You’re the one who I’ve heard is most responsible. Congratulations.” One of those oddities.

### A *TITANIC* POSTMORTEM

*Now, 25 years later, it has become more fashionable to say that* L.A. Confidential *should have won. So why did Titanic win?*

**CAMERON** We had done an almost impossible thing, which is we had made ourselves an underdog in a weird way. We had created a scenario in which we appeared to fight our way back and have a triumph when the chips were down. The chips were down only because everybody made the chips down. I didn’t fricking do it.

**MECHANIC** We were unquestionably the best movie. I didn’t even think there was a second place that year. It towers above every movie not because it was expensive, but because it was good.


Horvitz

**SWARTZ** *Titanic* was the best overall achievement. Remember, in those days there were just five nominees and you could win with just 21 percent. The key was to be the best overall achievement.

**TABACK** If you saw one movie that year in a theater, you saw *Titanic*. I don’t believe everyone watched all those other movies. Plus, you had the muscle behind it of two of the biggest studios in Hollywood.

**FRIEDMAN** It was a cultural phenomenon.

**ZANE** True story, costume, tears.

**CAMERON** Did we win by a landslide or did we win by one vote? You never know.

*But it was all worth it, right?*

**CAMERON** The trauma that you go through to get a statue to put on your bar? It ain’t worth it, baby. Trust me.

---

*All quotes were sourced from interviews for this story except Affleck’s, which came from a 2021 interview with the reporter. An expanded version of this oral history can be found at* THR.com.

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# Reviews

Television

Delroy Lindo and Kerry Washington play a father and daughter facing their history in a show drawn from creator Tracy McMillan's life.

KELSEY MCNEAL/HULU

## *UnPrisoned*

A therapist (Kerry Washington) finds her life upended when her father (Delroy Lindo) is released from prison in Hulu's messy but fascinating comedy series **By Angie Han**

Like any good shrink, Hulu's *UnPrisoned* begins by meeting its characters where they are — and where they are at first seems to be an odd-couple comedy. Paige (Kerry Washington) is a therapist whose Instagram-friendly polish masks a messy life; her father, Edwin (Delroy Lindo), is a natural charmer fresh off a 17-year prison sentence. It doesn't take a relationship expert to foresee the battles to come over old grudges, new boundaries, or Paige's teenage son, Finn (Faly Rakotohavana).

But also like a good shrink, *UnPrisoned* has no interest in sticking to the surface. It wants, over the course of its eight episodes, to dig and dig and dig, all the way down to the kinds of formative childhood traumas that take a lifetime to unpack. The journey isn't always a pleasant one; the contrast between the series' bubbly surface and its brittle core can result in a distinctly acrid tang. Yet the same unevenness that makes the show confounding is also what makes it oddly compelling, as it strives in earnest toward the grace that has so long eluded its heroine.

Initially, though, *UnPrisoned* (Onyx Collective's first scripted comedy) just feels off. While its comic tone and half-hour run time suggest an easy-breezy comfort watch, there's an anxious quality that makes it stick in the throat. It's in Paige's too-broad smile and self-deprecating laugh, and in the strained friendliness between Edwin and Paige when she picks him up from the penitentiary. When the show does go for straight laughs, it often reaches for the low-hanging fruit of obvious sex jokes — like the mortification of Paige's phone reading out sexts in front of her dad and son — which seem to have been written for some other, broader sitcom.

*UnPrisoned* fares better with humor mined from the contrast between Paige's trained-professional approach to the relationships in her life and Edwin's more pragmatic, streetwise one. In one episode, Paige's smug insistence that her still-married boyfriend's (Tim Daly) honesty with her is a sign of his seriousness is upended by Edwin's countering insistence that it's a red flag: "The side chick, she knows everything," he explains, "'cause the man doesn't give a fuck what the sidepiece thinks." When Edwin lies to Paige about his job prospects later in the episode, it reads as both a minor betrayal of her trust and an affirmation that he truly does care about her in his own imperfect way.

**AIRDATE** Friday, March 10 (Hulu)
**CAST** Kerry Washington, Delroy Lindo, Marque Richardson, Faly Rakotohavana, Jordyn McIntosh, Brenda Strong
**CREATOR** Tracy McMillan

As a character, Edwin benefits tremendously from Lindo's towering magnetism. He generates instant chemistry with all the actors in his orbit — including the many random women he's able to win over with hoary lines like "Has anyone ever told you you look just like Jennifer Lopez?" His complicated reconciliation with Paige may be the meat of the series, but his frisky relationship with on-off girlfriend Nadine (a fabulous Brenda Strong) and his affectionate mentorship of his grandson make for some of the sweetest moments. When Lindo is given more dramatic material — as in the standout sixth episode, which turns into a meditation on Blackness as the family revisits their painful history in Edwin's Alabama hometown — he runs away with it.

Lindo is so lovable, in fact, that his allure threatens to skew the audience's sympathies in Edwin's favor when he's butting heads with Paige. By contrast, Washington nails Paige's wariness, vulnerability and capacity for kindness, but doesn't overly concern herself with trying to make her seem likable. ("Being a therapist kind of fucks with your people-pleasing skills," she says with a shrug.) Her prickliness keeps *UnPrisoned* from feeling as warm as it could, though the series starts to mellow as Paige opens up.

That patience with Paige feels like a form of generosity. Here's a show that doesn't insist Paige has to be perfect to be deserving of love, that acknowledges her feelings as valid, that takes seriously the emotional scars left behind by her father's decades-long struggle with the criminal justice system. Creator Tracy McMillan

AWARDS CHATTER

The Hollywood Reporter

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Candid conversations with award season's leading contenders

HOSTED BY

SCOTT FEINBERG

Senior Awards Analyst

LISTEN WHEREVER PODCASTS ARE HEARD

The Hollywood Reporter

(formerly a writer on *Mad Men* and *Runaways*) has said she based the series on her own real-life experiences, and that shows in such displays of understanding.

The boldest narrative flourish here is the sporadic appearance of Paige's metaphorical inner child, depicted onscreen as a literal child: Jordyn McIntosh dressed in Hanna Andersson-size versions of Washington's flared jeans and embellished blazers, giving voice to frustrations Paige would never express out loud. As a running gag, it's more miss than hit. The conceit is too cutesy by half, threatening to tip the series over into full-tilt wackiness without conveying a whole lot we can't already glean from Washington's disgruntled facial expressions.

But it's also a vivid illustration of *UnPrisoned*'s ideas about the way childhood wounds reverberate into adulthood — and it gains new resonance in the second half of the season, when the show allows it to play as something other than a joke. That *UnPrisoned* spends so long struggling to take the motif seriously feels, with the benefit of hindsight, less like a miscalculation than an intentional choice to reflect Paige's own tendency to paper over unruly feelings with strained laughs and forced cheer.

"Sometimes, until you make the wrong choice, you don't really know what the right choice is," Nadine advises Paige late in the season. With its awkward mix of tones, *UnPrisoned* plays at times like a series made up of wrong choices on the way to finding the right one. But even in its flaws — or maybe because of them — the show finds intriguing depth in the messiness of experience, and the clear-eyed compassion of someone who's worked through enough of it to grasp the difference between what people owe one another and what we *want* to provide for one another; between excusing someone's bad behavior and forgiving it; between being right and being free.

Woody Harrelson is a former NBA coach enlisted for an unusual new gig.

COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

# Champions

Woody Harrelson plays a basketball coach who leads a team of disabled players in Bobby Farrelly's endearing solo directorial debut **By Frank Scheck**

Stop me if you've heard this one before. An irascible, down-on-his-luck coach is reluctantly put in charge of a ragtag team of misfits who can barely play the game. Although he can hardly disguise his initial disgust, the players' enthusiastic attitudes and general lovability soften him up until he becomes not just their coach but also their most ardent cheerleader. In the process, he becomes a better person.

That's the *Bad News Bears*-style template for the latest cinematic variation on the subject, starring Woody Harrelson in a role he was seemingly born to play. You don't need to have seen the 2018 Spanish hit comedy *Campeones*, which won multiple Goya Awards, to think that its U.S. remake, *Champions*, feels overly familiar. But that doesn't make this crowd-pleaser any less winning.

In this case, the team is composed of young basketball players with intellectual disabilities, whom Marcus (Harrelson) is enlisted to coach when he's sentenced to 90 days of community service after ramming the back of a police car. A former NBA coach, he's already had a streak of bad luck, having recently been fired from his assistant coaching position at a Des Moines minor league team after violently shoving the head coach (Ernie Hudson) during a heated argument over strategy.

Since his only alternative is to spend the 90 days in jail, Marcus accepts the assignment of coaching the "Friends" (in the Spanish film the team was called "Los Amigos," which gives you an idea of the faithfulness of Mark Rizzo's screenplay) for the Special Olympics. Needless to say, he's unimpressed with their hoop skills, and he's not exactly sensitive when it comes to their differences. Another complicating factor comes in the form of his unexpected reunion with a player's older sister, Alex (Kaitlin Olson, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*), with whom he recently had a one-night stand.

It all goes exactly as you'd expect, with the Friends and Marcus slowly warming up to one another as he manages to whip them into something resembling a cohesive team, and Marcus and Alex discovering that their desire for each other goes beyond the physical. There are, of course, plenty of misunderstandings and obstacles along the way, which director Bobby Farrelly skillfully mines for laughs.

Yes, *that* Bobby Farrelly, who hasn't exactly proved himself a paragon of political correctness in such films co-directed with his brother Peter as *Dumb and Dumber*, *There's Something About Mary* and *Shallow Hal*. There's certainly plenty of opportunity here for the humor to go south, but Farrelly, making his solo feature directorial debut, strikes exactly the right tone, with the film having plenty of fun at Harrelson's character's expense while treating his young charges with dignity. That's not to say the Friends don't provide plenty of laughs, especially their newest member, Cosentino (a hilarious Madison Tevlin), whose sharp comments frequently put Marcus in his place.

That the film succeeds to the extent that it does is also a testament to Harrelson, the rare actor who can be endearing even when his character is behaving like a boorish jerk. He's simply impossible to dislike, and here he handles Marcus' gradual transformation with his usual skill and well-honed comic chops. Matching him note for note is Olson, delivering a vibrantly sexy, funny performance as a woman who doesn't suffer fools gladly.

Playing the team members are 10 young disabled actors (Joshua Felder, Kevin Iannucci, Ashton Gunning, Matthew Von Der Ahe, Tom Sinclair, James Day Keith, Alex Hintz, Casey Metcalfe, Bradley Edens and Tevlin), some with performing experience and some not, but all coming across like seasoned comic pros. And Cheech Marin, who has entered the avuncular phase of his career, has some fun moments as the recreational facility head who gently guides Marcus through his unaccustomed duties.

By the time *Champions* reaches its all too predictable yet still satisfying happy ending, you'll be fully aware of every one of its feel-good machinations. And you probably won't mind at all.

**RELEASE DATE** Friday, March 10 (Focus)
**CAST** Woody Harrelson, Kaitlin Olson, Matt Cook, Ernie Hudson, Cheech Marin, Madison Tevlin, Joshua Felder
**DIRECTOR** Bobby Farrelly
Rated PG-13, 2 hours 3 minutes

THE Hollywood REPORTER

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# THR Insider

Innovators, Events, Honors

SXSW Preview

Comedian, screenwriter, director and children's book author Julio Torres.

## 'Creating Art From Problems'

### Julio Torres (*SNL, Los Espookys*) brings his surrealist comedy to SXSW with directorial debut *Problemista*

By Mia Galuppo

**Julio Torres** extracts the fanciful from the mundane. In his HBO special *My Favorite Shapes,* the stand-up riffs on a collection of random plastic objects. Perhaps the most famous of the deeply original, often moving sketches he wrote in his tenure at *SNL* centered on a man (**Ryan Gosling**) tormented by the Papyrus font and its perplexing use in the marketing material for *Avatar*. The hero of his children's book, *I Want to Be a Vase,* is a toilet plunger.

"I joke that we've had it up to here with magical children in prep school," says the 36-year-old comedian of high-concept fare. "How is that genre so much bigger than the I-don't-know-how-I'm-gonna-make-rent genre?"

It was with this mindset that he made *Problemista*, his feature directorial debut, in which he stars as an aspiring toy designer in New York City with an expiring work visa who takes a job with an art-world outcast (played by **Tilda Swinton**) in order to stay in the country.

The surreal A24 feature, produced by Oscar winner **Emma Stone** and fellow *SNL* alum **Dave McCary**, draws inspiration from what Torres calls the "Kafkaesque" bureaucracy of the U.S. immigration system.

***Problemista***

March 13
Paramount
Theater

Ahead of the film's premiere at SXSW on March 13, Torres talked to *THR* about *Problemista,* the inspiration it draws from his own experience as an immigrant from El Salvador and the challenges of shooting in a realistic New York apartment: "There are no windows in the living room."

**In past interviews, you have talked about taking a job as an archivist to be able to stay in the U.S. after college. Did this script come out of that personal experience?**
Yeah, it's very much a mosaic of different experiences. I think it mostly communicates on how I felt at a particular point in time. When you see it, you'll see it's not completely grounded in truth, but the seed of it stems from my recollection of a lived experience.

**What was that feeling you wanted to capture?**
Feeling at the crossroads between finding myself and being in a very — what, at the time, felt like a challenging position. Finding myself in the midst of those problems that at the time felt dangerous but exciting. It's very much about seeing yourself in all the chaos that life provides. It's a crucial moment in the life of every young person, every young artist: How does circumstance mold the person you become? I have a friend of a friend, and they don't say "coming-of-age" — they say "coming into self." Which I think is a very nice distinction because the character is fully in his 20s, so he's not growing up, but the pieces are falling into place.

**What about the U.S. immigration system — your experience or otherwise — made you want to make a movie about it?**
To varying degrees, everyone at some point has felt like an other or like their circumstances are different from everybody else's. Things can feel very lonely sometimes, and in my case, the cards that I was dealt — the bureaucratic, logistical, Kafkaesque nightmare cards

TORRES: MITCH ZACHARY. *PROBLEMISTA, FLAMIN, TETRIS*: COURTESY OF SXSW. *BLACKBERRY*: COURTESY OF IFC FILMS. *DUNGEONS*: COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES. CHEETOS: JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES. GAME: COURTESY OF BRAND. TETRIS, PHONE: ADOBE STOCK.

— really informed the person I became. The thing about the quote-unquote immigrant experience is it's just so vastly different depending on where you're coming from and where you are in life. People I know who have gone through similar experiences react to it being like, "Yeah, that's how it feels." Something that I say a lot is that I'm very interested in portraying things as they feel, not necessarily how they are. I'm very interested in all those bureaucracies that cloud our day-to-day lives that we rarely see in movies. Like, where's the insurance company movie? Even though those hurdles in life are not as dramatically accessible as falling in love or robbing a bank, they are more common, and they stay with you and scar you and traumatize you and make you grow.

**Was the plan always for you to direct?**

No. When I was writing it, I thought, "Maybe I'll be in it." I always wanted to direct, but when I started writing, I felt like it wasn't the right time, like it was too soon. The timeline, as we had it, before 2020, was that I was going to write a movie, then I was going to finish a new season of [HBO series] *Los Espookys* and direct an episode and have that be the trial run. After that, I was going to see how I liked it and then talk about whether I should direct this movie. But then, of course, things shifted and this movie was written and directed all during the COVID hiatus that we had to take for *Los Espookys*.

**What is one lesson you learned from directing that you'll carry with you to other projects?**

The importance of picking good collaborators. When you are liking what you are doing, there's a joy that comes with that. The work that I have done before this wasn't super collaborative. Obviously, stand-up is not a collaborative medium. I like it when I work with people who are very excited to bring their own thing to the work. I'll always be searching for that.

**How did Tilda Swinton come on board?**

The script got to her and she was already familiar with my work, and so she was very excited to be in it. The thing about working with her is that she's so giving. It's a testament to her that she never felt intimidating. It really felt no different to me than the joy of working with friends.

**You shot in New York City. Did you have a favorite location?**

I loved how real my character's apartment [in Brooklyn] felt. It wasn't an idealized version of a young person in New York's apartment. It's very cramped. There are no windows in the living room. It was not ideal to shoot in, but it just felt like, "Oh yeah, I know what to do with this." I know where to sit, I know where to lean.

**What does the title, *Problemista*, mean?**

Oh my God, the title. (*Laughs.*) It changed a lot, but we came to a very happy place with it. First of all, it's fun to say, which I always like. It looks nice, which I always like. To me, in the way that I define it in this movie, it's someone who either creates or seeks problems and/or someone who creates art from problems. Someone who is comfortable in problems.

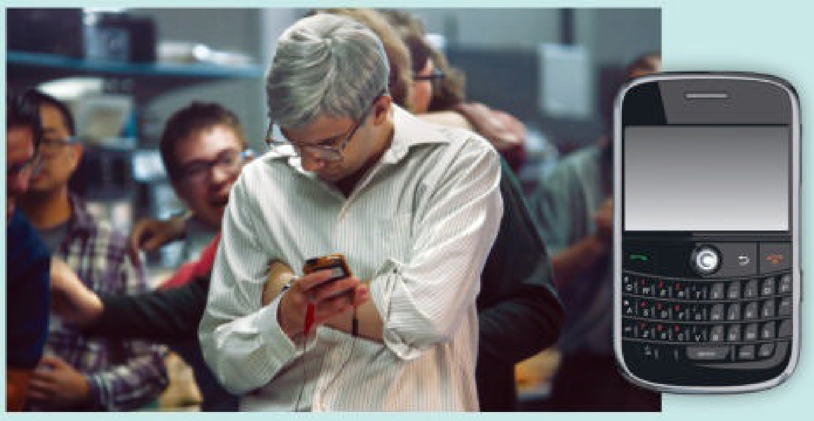
---

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*

In *Problemista*, Torres plays an aspiring toy designer who finds an art-world outcast (Tilda Swinton) to sponsor his visa to remain in the United States.

## BASED ON A TRUE PRODUCT

Trend alert! Ahead of the April 5 release of the Air Jordans movie *Air*, four movies in the SXSW festival lineup draw inspiration from consumer goods



***BLACKBERRY***

Based on **Jacquie McNish** and **Sean Silcoff**'s book *Losing the Signal*, *BlackBerry* stars **Jay Baruchel** and **Glenn Howerton** and traces the rise and steep decline of the now-bygone Canadian proto-smartphone, which flourished in the liminal space between flip phones and the iPhone.

ESSENTIALS KIT
ESSENTIALS KIT

***DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOR AMONG THIEVES***

Created in 1974, the role-playing fantasy board game was long considered impossible to adapt, given its lack of a central storyline. Warner Bros. and Universal have both taken stabs. Now it's Paramount's turn, with a version set inside the world of the game, from writer-directors **John Francis Daley** and **Jonathan Goldstein**.

NEW BIGGER SIZE!
Cheetos
Crunchy
Flamin' Hot

***FLAMIN' HOT***

**Eva Longoria**'s directorial debut follows **Richard Montañez**, who claimed to have invented Flamin' Hot Cheetos while a janitor at Frito-Lay. In 2021, after the film wrapped, the *Los Angeles Times* called into question that compelling story, reporting that Montañez contributed to the snack's development but was not its originator.

***TETRIS***

The **Taron Egerton**-starring Apple movie dramatizes the long and tortuous rights battle and back-channel diplomacy that brought the beloved Russian-made puzzle video game — invented by Soviet software engineer **Alexey Pajitnov** — to Nintendo in the 1980s, and how the Game Boy popularized it on a global scale. — M.G.

ChatGPT:
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## OUT WITH THE CRYPTO, IN WITH THE CHATBOTS

The tech community turns its attention to the promise and perils of generative AI

If last year's SXSW was driven by panels and events around Web3, NFTs and the metaverse, this year's has decidedly cooled on the crypto craze and is instead focused on something entirely different: chatbots.

Though chatbots are by no means new technology, the launch last fall of OpenAI's ChatGPT has sparked renewed interest in — and anxiety over — the use of AI-powered chatbots across multiple industries, in part because of their growing sophistication. (See "Faith Against the Machine," right.) Screenwriters in film and TV have become more wary of the impact ChatGPT could have on the scriptwriting process, given that the chatbot is already capable of churning out short scripts; organizations like the Writers Guild of America West say they are actively monitoring the technology "in the event they require additional protections for writers."

All of these dynamics will be at play in Austin on March 10, the first day of SXSW, when executives and creatives gather to discuss the ramifications of generative AI. OpenAI's co-founder and president, **Greg Brockman**, will participate in a featured discussion to talk about the real-world impact of his company's generative AI, which also includes the AI-powered digital image creator DALL-E.

Earlier that day, **Chris Hyams**, CEO of the jobs listing site Indeed, will talk about how AI is disrupting the workplace by replacing some job functions or positions entirely.

On March 12, BuzzFeed CEO **Jonah Peretti**, who has announced that the digital media company will rely in part on AI-generated content, will join Semafor co-founder **Ben Smith** to discuss how the technology will affect the next generation of creatives.

Also on March 12, a related conversation about deepfakes and AI-generated imagery — by the likes of OpenAI's DALL-E — will encourage guardrails around generative media. — J. CLARA CHAN

# Faith Against the Machine

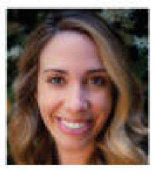
## Peacock comedy *Mrs. Davis* is a perfectly timed warning about AI madness

By James Hibberd

Imagine ChatGPT, but more. More popular, more omniscient, more nefarious than today's cutting-edge chatbots.

That's the premise of *Mrs. Davis,* an ultra-ambitious series from *Big Bang Theory* veteran **Tara Hernandez** and *Watchmen* creator **Damon Lindelof**. *Mrs. Davis*, premiering at SXSW before its April 20 streaming debut on Peacock, tells the story of a heroic, street-savvy nun (three-time *GLOW* Emmy nominee **Betty Gilpin**) battling an omnipresent AI and its legion of obsessed fans who will do anything to please their tech deity (called Mrs. Davis), which is supposedly striving to make the world a better place. Oh, and there's also a quest for the Holy Grail, possible Nazis with butterfly nets, nefarious magicians and a make-out session with Jesus — and that's just in the first two episodes. As Gilpin's character, Simone, says at one point: "It's a lot."

Lindelof


Hernandez

"The most exciting thing about *Mrs. Davis* is that there's nothing like *Mrs. Davis*," says Hernandez.

The series was immaculately conceived during the early months of the pandemic, when Hernandez and Lindelof wished there were a benevolent algorithm that could cut through the blizzard of conflicting COVID-19 information and definitively explain, for instance, whether disinfecting groceries was useful or not. "We were like, 'God, I just wish there was an app that said whether this is a huge waste of time,' " Lindelof says.

Betty Gilpin (*GLOW*) plays a street-smart nun on a mission to combat runaway artificial intelligence on the series *Mrs. Davis.*

Straight off, their choice to have a cool-nun heroine was a bold one given the heavily tarnished reputation of the Catholic Church (the nuns who sadistically torture a Native American character in Paramount+'s *1923* are more aligned with the cultural vibe). "It definitely felt subversive and terrifying to us because they're not somebody that people here on the West Coast typically prop up as heroes

## YES, THERE'S STILL PLENTY OF GREAT MUSIC AT SXSW

*THR* senior music editor Mesfin Fekadu finds a lot to love in this year's lineup

**SANS SOUCIS**

To understand why the music press is raving about the Italian Congolese singer right now, just listen to her recently released "Merchants."

*March 14 at The Courtyard; March 17 at The Stay Put*

CHATGPT: BEATA ZAWRZEL/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES. LINDELOF: STEWART COOK/VARIETY/PENSKE MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES. HERNANDEZ: MARK LAMMERDING. SOUCIS: SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES. NOVAH: PARAS GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR BLACK MUSIC HONORS. DANIELS: JASON DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES FOR CMT. *DAVIS*: SOPHIE KOHLER/PEACOCK. *LOVE*: COURTESY OF HBO MAX. *RABBIT*: MARNI GROSSMAN/PARAMOUNT+. *SWARM*: QUANTRELL D. COLBERT/AMAZON PRIME VIDEO.

## SXSW'S TOP TV PREMIERES

When and where to catch the most anticipated shows screening at the festival

***LOVE AND DEATH* (HBO MAX)**
From 11-time Emmy winner **David E. Kelley** comes this true-crime limited series about rural Texas housewife **Candy Montgomery** (**Elizabeth Olsen**), who was accused of ax murdering her friend in 1980. *March 11, Paramount Theatre*

***RABBIT HOLE* (PARAMOUNT+)**
**Kiefer Sutherland** returns to TV in a role that's right in his action-thriller wheelhouse. The *24* star plays a master of corporate espionage framed for murder by a shadowy organization. *March 12, Stateside Theatre*

***SWARM* (PRIME VIDEO)**
The horror series from **Donald Glover** and fellow *Atlanta* vet **Janine Nabers** follows a young woman (**Dominique Fishback**) who's obsessed with a **Beyoncé**-like pop star. *March 10, Paramount Theatre* — J.H.

of a story," Lindelof says. "But at this point, we're not pulling punches, so we're just going to go for it and see if we can get people on board with her journey."

Instead of the usual evil AI tropes, the team was instead interested in exploring the idea of a system clearly programmed to be benevolent — and how even that could still go wrong. "Instead of the AI wiping out humanity, what would that look like?" Lindelof says. "To us, that felt like the more potentially comedic and interesting way of looking at the God question, which is: What do people turn to God for? How does God make people feel? The thing about AI is it takes away the best part of God's branding, which is mystery."

As the team put the finishing touches on the show, they watched OpenAI's ChatGPT bot become part of a massive cultural conversation about the technology and its potential misuses. "The writers' chat thread is, like, blowing up," Hernandez says. "I actually think it's a good thing that it's happening now because we wouldn't have gotten anything done" if it had launched earlier, because they'd have been swept into the discussion. Lindelof admits that, to some extent, the idea of potential viewers who had gained a clearer sense of AI and its limitations worried the team. "We've wondered if it's challenging our thesis now that you're starting to see the first articles being written about how stupid it really is," he says. "If you ask [chatbots] to do anything outside the realm of what they've been programmed to do, they instantly reveal themselves to be idiots." Yet the writers still created their own rudimentary AI algorithm (which promptly named itself Larry Bel-Air) to write the show's episode titles. For the show's first episode — not its second — the bot provided the title "Quest! Quest! A Quest! (Part 2)."

Quips Lindelof: "Don't tell the WGA." THR

**JADE NOVAH**
She's already garnered nearly a million followers on Instagram thanks to her hilarious impersonations of **Beyoncé** and **Toni Braxton**, but Jade Novah is a major R&B talent in her own right, with songs like "Trip" and "Lost in You" as proof. *March 17 at The North Door*

**EMILY NENNI**
Of course this California-born and Nashville-based performer was going to have a future in music: Her first concert was **Bruce Springsteen** — in utero. With her knack for storytelling, she's a boss in her own right. *March 18 at Mohawk Outdoor*

**SUG DANIELS**
Blending genres like folk, R&B and soul, this Philadelphia-based singer-songwriter and producer (née **Danielle Johnson**) relies on sparse instrumentals and warbling vocals to create feel-good music that, well, makes you feel really, really good. *March 16 at The 13th Floor*

**BABA KUBOYE**
The grandnephew of Afrobeat legend **Fela Aníkúlápó-Kuti** is carving out his own space in the musical universe, and his 2022 release, *From Ikoyi With Horns*, is a whole mood. *March 17 at Community Concerts at Lady Bird Lake*

Awards Preview

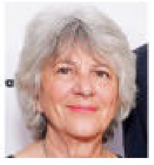
# 'You Can Really Think Out of the Box'

## The ICG Publicists Awards honor inventive film and TV marketing strategies

By Hilton Dresden

*Abbott Elementary* creator and star Quinta Brunson will receive the Television Showperson of the Year award.

The International Cinematographers Guild (Local 600)'s Publicists Awards will celebrate its 60th annual ceremony March 10, with *Abbott Elementary* creator and star **Quinta Brunson** set to receive the Television Showperson of the Year award. Additionally, the producing team behind *Top Gun: Maverick* — **Jerry Bruckheimer, Tom Cruise, David Ellison** and **Christopher McQuarrie** — will receive the Motion Picture Showpersons of the Year honor.



Main

Menke

"Quinta Brunson is the definition of [a showperson]," says **Tim Menke**, international theatrical publicist at Paramount and a co-chair of the ICG Publicists Awards. "She created [*Abbott Elementary*], she produces, she acts, she writes. She does it all." The ABC comedy also is among the nominees for best television publicity campaign, joined by *Ghosts*, *Prey*, *RuPaul's Drag Race: All Stars* ("They reinvented — they had drag queens on NASDAQ ringing the stock bell," says Menke) and *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*.

Adds Menke of *Top Gun: Maverick*: "Our industry was at a critical moment in terms of the pandemic — were people ever going to go back to the theater? *Top Gun* came out in May of last year. If you make it, they will come. And they came in droves." The Cruise vehicle is nominated alongside *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *Elvis*, *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*, *Nope* and *The Woman King* for the award for motion picture publicity campaign.

A film's achievement in a publicity campaign is not necessarily congruent with its Oscar ambitions — for instance, *Spider Man: Far From Home* took the top motion picture award last year but failed to land an Oscar nom. Publicists present their film campaign before fellow guild members, who then vote on the one that "works the hardest to get the most eyeballs, people in the seats, to the theater," says **Sally Main**, unit publicist and co-chair of the ceremony. To be eligible, the campaign must have been conducted by a guild member.

Over the years, Main and Menke have worked on some of the most iconic films ever released, including, for Menke, *Titanic*. But first, he handled another film featuring a *Titanic* star: *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*. "I could not have loved that movie any better," says Menke. "At that time, no one really knew **Leonardo DiCaprio**. There was a lot of elbow grease in terms of getting the film in front of press."

Menke recalls a completely different attitude toward the 1998 Oscar best picture winner, which turned DiCaprio from an up-and-comer into a leading man. "I was too busy answering the phone, as opposed to making the call," he says. "*Titanic* was scheduled to come out in the summer. But it got delayed to December, and everyone was nervous [that] something's wrong. Then, wham, they saw the movie."

**ICG Publicists Awards**

March 10, Beverly Hilton

Meanwhile, Main's work as a unit publicist means she collaborates with almost all of the studios, as opposed to being married to just one. "I help create the assets that the studios and filmmakers use to promote the film — the behind-the-scenes footage," she says. "We manage the unit photographer, we liaison with press for set visits. We find ways to create important assets that you can only create when you're actually filming."

This means, come awards time, it's not just best campaign and publicist of the year being handed out, though those categories are certainly highly esteemed. The awards also honor excellence in still photography, press and career achievement.

Social media has changed the way the publicity industry works, says Main. "It's brought a lot of creativity to the party. You can really think out of the box. It's just a different reach."

Few better examples exist of social media's campaigning impact than actress **Andrea Riseborough**'s surprise Oscar nom for *To Leslie*, which followed a ferocious celebrity word-of-mouth push during Academy voting. "Having seen the movie, I just think there is no question that it is so worthy — a tour de force performance," Menke says. "You cannot watch it and say that it wasn't deserved."

For Main, the ICG awards represent a unique moment for a group of people often unsung for their hard work: "We publicists are usually behind the scenes," she says. "But this is a time when everybody shows up: Yep, we're publicists. Here we are." THR

From left: Paramount's Brian Robbins and Bob Bakish, producer David Ellison, director Joseph Kosinski, Tom Cruise, Paramount's Shari Redstone and producers Jerry Bruckheimer and Christopher McQuarrie at the global premiere of *Top Gun: Maverick* in San Diego.

BRUNSON: MICHAEL ROWE/GETTY IMAGES FOR IMDB. MAIN, MENKE: RICH FURY/GETTY IMAGES. CRUISE: LEON BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES FOR PARAMOUNT PICTURES.

WHERE ART MEETS CRAFT

Exploring the crafts & tech behind the biggest films & series with the industry's most celebrated craftspeople

HOSTED BY
**CAROLYN GIARDINA**
Tech Editor

BEHIND THE
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The Hollywood Reporter

LISTEN WHEREVER PODCASTS ARE HEARD

The Hollywood Reporter

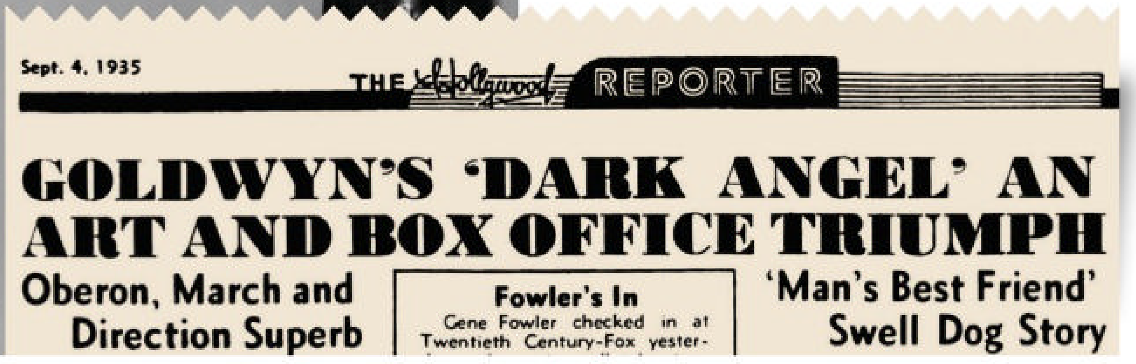
## 93 Years of *THR*

Memorable moments from a storied history

1926 1927 1928 1929 1930 1931 1932 1933 1934 1935 **1936** 1937 1938 1939 1940 1941 1942 1943 1944 1945 1946

# Oscar Nominee Merle Oberon Blazed a Trail in Secret

If *Everything Everywhere All at Once*'s Michelle Yeoh wins the best actress Oscar on March 12, she will become the first Asian to do so. But she's not the first to be nominated: Merle Oberon preceded Yeoh 87 years ago — though no one knew it at the time. The star of 1935's *The Dark Angel*, for which she was nominated, kept her Indian heritage hidden her entire life. Born in Bombay to a Sri Lankan-Maori mother and white father, Oberon grew up in poverty in Calcutta. When she was 17, she moved to England to pursue acting; fearing backlash from a racist entertainment industry, she claimed she was born in Tasmania and that her birth certificate was lost in a fire. She broke out playing Anne Boleyn in director Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933, which led to her being cast in Sidney Franklin's World War I drama *The Dark Angel*, produced by Samuel Goldwyn. *THR*'s review said, "Audiences will see a gloriously new, vibrant Merle Oberon, whose sensitive performance places her high in the cinema roster." While the 1936 Oscar went to *Dangerous*' Bette Davis, Oberon's career flourished, with starring roles opposite Laurence Olivier in 1939's *Wuthering Heights* and Marlon Brando in 1954's *Désirée*. In 1983, four years after she died from a stroke at 68, her ethnicity was revealed in Charles Higham and Roy Moseley's biography *Merle*. "Few could ever compare with [her], either as a timeless beauty or as a member of Hollywood's royalty," wrote *THR*'s Robert Osborne in a tribute on Nov. 26, 1979. "She was, in a word, class." — HILTON DRESDEN



Sept. 4, 1935

THE Hollywood REPORTER

GOLDWYN'S 'DARK ANGEL' AN ART AND BOX OFFICE TRIUMPH

Oberon, March and Direction Superb

Fowler's In

Gene Fowler checked in at Twentieth Century-Fox yester-

'Man's Best Friend' Swell Dog Story

Merle Oberon, Oscar-nominated for 1935's coming-of-age drama *The Dark Angel*, was born into poverty in Bombay and hid the fact that she was biracial her entire life.

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